











# PEOPLE WILL TALK



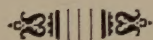


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# PEOPLE WILL TALK

By

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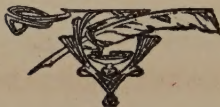
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# PEOPLE WILL TALK

## *Chapter One*

### THE DOORSTEP OF HEAVEN

#### 1

NEW people were moving in.

As often as possible, Mrs. Burgess went out on her back porch to shake her rugs. Once, craning her neck to peer through the neighbor's kitchen window, she saw a little, sleek-haired boy returning her stare from the doorway.

"Hello, sonny," Mrs. Burgess ventured, with the small laugh that was her invariable accompaniment to remarks to strangers. "You gonna live next door to me?"

"We've bought this house," he announced, edging over to her fence.

Mrs. Burgess tittered at this; then picking up the scarlet hall runner she said, "Ask your mother to let you come over and see me this afternoon, and I'll give you some nice, fresh jelly-cake."

At the front entrance to the small brick house where the drama was in progress, the younger element of the neighborhood was more frank in its scrutiny. Four pairs of neglected roller skates hung over the tiny iron fence that enclosed the yard. An express wagon in

which sat a sullen baby added to the crowd of spectators.

"Don' go monkeyin' with that hatrack," advised one of the negroes, leisurely moving in the belongings of the new family. "G'wan home 'n tell yuh mothah she wants yuh!"

Within the house, plump little Mrs. Lauren was bustling about with ecstatic importance, sweeping forgotten cobwebs from the ceiling, measuring corners and whispering calculations. She was in the height of her glory. She loved turmoil when she could see her way clear to bring order out of it.

"Put the chaste lounge right here in the bay-window," she directed the melancholy ducky who followed her into the front room. In his gorilla-long arms he carried the wicker and cretonne creation that was her particular pride and joy.

"At what you call it? Looks like a hammock growed legs," he commented, still holding it before him and rolling his tremendous eye-whites around the basketwork—a gorilla in a wicker cage. Sally Lauren laughed, then became engrossed in a window shade that "stuck".

Peter Lauren, the lord of the manor, was having a serious talk with the real estate agent in the cellar. The agent liked Peter. He was explaining his theory of neighborhoods. He had done it before—the day he brought Peter over to see the little brick house for the first time. But he had forgotten that. Peter noticed that he expounded his views with undiminished spontaneity. It embarrassed Peter to have him repeat himself and not realize it.

"Neighborhoods go up, or down. They never stand still," said the agent. "Lotta people can't tell which way they're going, and that's how they lose money. I'd rather spend five thousand in a bad neighborhood that was improving than four thousand for the same property in a good neighborhood that was runnin' down." He removed his cigar and spat unceremoniously on the cement floor of Peter's cellar.

He had spat last week, when he was the host and Peter the guest, as it were, but now that their positions were reversed, Peter thought spitting presumptuous. Still, since his ownership depended entirely on the payment of but one hundred dollars "down", perhaps proprietorship was a fine point.

"You got a safe buy. There ain't no niggers for eight blocks, and that's a lot to say in Washington. Garfield Park is what makes this neighborhood safe. Houses around a park are apt to stay good longer," the real estate man continued, warming up to his subject. "The new school they built across the street is drawin' better people to this block. Everything taken together, you got a safe buy."

At last he gave Peter the key, and explained again about the Building Association payments. "I'm goina watch you, young fella. In a coupla years you can sell this place for five hundred more'n it cost you. In a few years you'll be moving up next the President," he declared as he left, shaking Peter's hand in his moist, soiled one, and fondling the curls of little Nancy, who had come out to listen to Daddy and the man.

"Up near the President—that's not so much. We

roomed up there three weeks when we first come. I couldn't see it was so much," Peter thought resentfully. "Nice on the outside, but inside there were waterbugs in the bathroom. . . ." Of course, he knew the real estate man was being friendly, but he didn't like being watched and "young fella-ed".

"When you see Daddy talkin' with men, you must stay in with Mother. It don't look nice for little girls to be standin' around waitin' for men to notice them," he told his small daughter, as he closed the door.

The house had that bare, echoing quality of houses where life has not been for a while. Furniture huddled grotesquely in the center of the rooms, and curtainless windows gaped like insane eyes.

"Come up, Daddy," called Peter's wife. "They didn't fix the spigot in the bath tub; it's still leaking, and I can't get the stain off the marble."

It was characteristic that Sally should begin scrubbing the rust stain from the "marble" before she arranged the furniture. She had brought her cleaning paraphernalia in her handbag. Little housewives were like that in 1906!

In Peter's suitcase, which he himself carried over to the new house, was a pot of mellow, baked beans, ready to be popped into the new gas oven. The Laurens must make their first dinner in the new home a *real* one—no sandwiches and milk from the corner store for Sally's family.

Even Peter's lunch was wrapped in waxed paper, ready for him to start on the night shift at four o'clock.



## 2

Little houses crouched on their haunches like toads, with dull bulging eyes that glistened only when the street lights struck them. As Peter strode home at midnight, little houses had new importance.

He felt a kinship in them, just as the men who worked with him in the Navy Yard were peculiarly his brothers, because of their common knowledge of rivets and micrometers and thread-cutters. Strange—the more you know of the world, the more you can belong to it, and it to you!

He passed an old house being torn down. Ghosts of old rooms were marked on the walls by squares of dingy wall paper. Somewhere, thought Peter, there are people who remember with sorrow a vision of tan wall paper scrawled over by pink roses. They think of a window looking into a narrow back yard when sudden joy confronts them; and a staircase that went up to little rooms mounts their memories.

This new house of his—what part would it play in his life? You must reckon with a house, just as if you took some new person into your family.

Peter was tired. Four hours' sleep the night before—then he was up, whistling and important in the furnished flat to which they were saying good-bye. All day stooping, tying and bundling; eight hours—since four o'clock—in the oily, shrieking shop, shouting back and forth to the other men, and serving the giant machine to which he was harnessed. Tired, but elated as only life's simple lovers can be.



## *Chapter Two*

### SMALL ENCHANTMENTS

#### I

SALLY was just beginning to grow sleepy when she heard Peter's key in the front door lock. He came tiptoeing into the little dining room, his face alight with pleasure and surprise, because she had completely arranged everything as though they had been living in The House for weeks.

She had finished not more than fifteen minutes before, but it was like her to dramatize herself, sitting leisurely with ankles crossed neatly before her, sewing on a lavender dimity dress for Nancy. She had pictured herself thus ever since Peter left at four o'clock, and had worked like a fury to materialize the picture she wanted him to see at midnight. Herself, cool and fresh and wide awake; The House, gleaming with newness, all arranged!

"Dearest—dearest," Peter whispered in his funny old way, bending over to kiss the back of her neck. "You shouldn't have done it all!"

"Isn't it wonderful, Daddy!" she whispered back, dropping the lavender wisp and twining her roughened little hands about his neck to draw him close. He looked tired, and so heartbreakingly good—like a boy determined to make his mother proud of him.

"I was thinking to-night as I came home how lucky we are to be so secure together here, you and I, and upstairs the children, sleeping. Fellas in the Yard I know are always telling me their troubles—wives that spend more than they can afford; wives that are jealous and suspicious and write to the Boss to find out if they are really working at night. That's terrible, Sally. Makes a man such a monkey before the other fellas. They got so many things not quite right to worry about; mothers-in-law that make trouble; no hope of havin' children; or too many children; sickness; getting tired of each other; cheap plans for havin' other girls. You'd be surprised how many chances there are to be unhappy!

"And here we are, lovin' each other, and understandin' each other, and beginnin' to get along in the world—our own home and two smart little youngsters. Makes a fella feel like he ought to sorta do something good to show the Boss he appreciates it," Peter said.

"I know," she answered simply.

They went out together to the back yard, bare and forlornly hemmed in by a white-washed fence, but beautiful and mysterious in the moonlight—because it was earth and belonged to them! Their house made a tiny exclamation point against the sky.

"Somethin' wonderful about ownin' a chunk of land, and a pile of bricks, locked up against the rest of the world and marked with your name," Peter said, with his boyish, boastful grin. "I guess it must be because all my grandfathers and great-grandfathers, and

the guys that came before them, pinned their lives to a strip of land.

"They usta go rampaging out to sea once in a while—long nights with nothin' but sea all around them, and stars over their heads, and danger under their feet. Then they'd come home to their own trees, and the fences that marked their ground off from the next fella's, and their own houses.

"They usta wrestle with the ground and fight with it until it gave up enough grain and vegetables to keep 'em livin'. I've heard my father say a man needed to marry himself to a piece of ground just as much as he needed to marry a wife. He usta say it, but he never cared much himself, someway. Why, he didn't even finish payin' for Mother's house before he left! He was a sentimental cuss, Sally—full of fine talk, but that's as far as it went. That's where I get my speech makin', I guess."

He fell silent. Old Joles was always sticking his rollicking, sentimental words in Peter's mind, and dragging his hateful deeds in the wake of them, to leave the old pain.

"The women, too, I think loved land, Peter." Sally took up the story hastily. Peter mustn't let Joles spoil to-night. "But I guess women love land because it helps them hold their men.

"Land means their men to them, somehow. When they're away on their dangerous ships, with the more dangerous stars looking for a chance to put strange notions in their heads, the women are content, knowing their men will come back to see if the roof they fixed



is still holdin' out against the rain, and if the apple trees that oughta bear this year are beginnin' to blossom. They love their land because some man built the fences, and some man sunk a well like a trap for a little underground stream, and harnessed the wind in a windmill." Sally smiled.

"This is only the first house, Sally. Some day we must have one in the country—a big, broad one with trees in front of it, and plenty of room upstairs, so the children can come and spend their vacations." Peter threw back his head and laughed happily.

"Ain't that like me! Got too much happiness to-night to use up, so I shoot some of it a hundred years ahead! When I was a kid and usta be laying under my straw hat in a hot field at noontime, between the strawberry rows, sickish sweet and sandy in the sun, I usta think about . . . to-night. And here's to-night, and I'm telling you about our grandchildren!"

"You hafta, Peter. I was thinkin' to-day that part of bein' happy means havin' something ahead of you. I went around straightening the furniture, puttin' the green clock Benny gave us on the mantel, and fluffing the pillows on the settee, and all the time thinkin' little happy thoughts into them—sorta, you know, like they'd come out to us a long time from now, if we ever needed them. Yes, I guess it's partly the future that makes you happy in the present, if you feel you've got a friendly future ahead of you."

Peter put a brick on the new garbage can to keep the neighborhood cats from exploring; then they went indoors.

Upstairs, in the bedroom of the children, Nancy and Eric slept in their twin cots—very white and not quite real in the moonlight.

Nancy's heavy auburn hair was twisted into kid curlers in comic little doughnuts all over her small head. One plump little fist was curled under her flushed cheek; the other was flung over towards Eric's cot in a little proffering gesture, like an actress greeting her public.

"Portrait of an angel in kid curlers," said Peter with a chuckle. Sally straightened out the twisted, restless limbs of her son, and crooned in her tender way. "Well, what's his old frown for—all mad and worried looking, darlin'?"

It was a moment, perfect and audaciously exquisite in happiness. A chunk of earth, a pile of bricks, four little humans, and a friendly future!

## 2

Sally and Peter, and the children as well, had that scrubbed look you see occasionally—oftenest in the country, once in a while in suburbs ranged sheepishly about a city and almost never in metropolitan neighborhoods.

Peter was solid and a little under medium height, straight and proud looking in his cheap hand-me-downs. He was somehow more than usually dignified in his youthfulness. The lips of his humorous mouth were fine and thin—a little too thin—and his eyes

were remorselessly honest. He was a man on whom you would depend instinctively for the last cruel tug of his effort.

He would never have a need for big things to make himself big. Little jobs, little houses, and people whose lives run in small channels—these would be Peter's lot. Yet he gave an impression of bigness and significance.

Sally was shameless in her adoration. She used no powder on her fine, pink skin, because Peter disliked powder. She herself adored it, but that didn't matter enough to make Peter uncomfortable. Sometimes she spent shy moments at the toilet counters of department stores, lovingly handling decorative flagons and jars, tilting her plain little head this way and that as she sniffed forbidden fragrance.

"Even the names are sweet—'Rain-flower,' 'Touch of Love,' 'Blue Anemones'—they might be the names of poems, perfume poems," she used to think. But when the clerk attempted to spray misty fragrance from the little crystal atomizer, she shrank back in alarm. Peter had a keen sense of smell, and he disliked echoes of perfume clinging ever so slightly to her clothing.

Sally didn't suppose he'd really be angry if she used it; he "just wouldn't like it", and that would be enough to counteract her own pleasure of it. It was characteristic that she never experimented in discovering what he *would* do.

Sally was soft and dimply, with credulous, glory-gifted eyes. No matter what she wore, she had the

look of a little girl "playing lady". Smartness was impossible for her, yet she yearned for it with all her tidy little soul. She made her clothes with elaborate intricacies, little flowers of lace cut out and set into her underwear, colored knots of silk tucked in unexpectedly and tiny, hand-embroidered initials flaunting themselves boldly on everything she wore.

In the back of her mind was always buzzing a frenzy of cretonne dreams—visions of expensive looking splendor that could be worked out nicely in sateen or silkaline.

"People used to stop me on the street and ask me where I bought your darling little baby bonnets, all lace and ribbon and tatting," she often told Nancy proudly. And Nancy, even when she was only seven or eight, used to squirm in her austere little soul, imagining how the baby that was unbelievably herself must have been humiliated by such display.

"Seventeen yards of lace!" Sally exclaimed dramatically to herself, every time she remembered the dress little Nancy wore to say her first "piece" at the Sunday school Christmas celebration. "And every inch of it sewed on by hand!"

Peter tolerated these extravagances in Nancy's little baby garments, because they made Sally so proud. He even permitted the little silken bows and embroidered flowers and butterflies on Sally's underwear, because he didn't want to hurt her feelings. But the clothes she wore on the street he insisted must be severe and as nearly tailored as possible with self-fitting and a lame, halt and blind, secondhand sewing machine.



"You don't want to look conspicuous," he often said. "You know men talk awful disrespectful about women on the street who have showy clothes on."

Although she never resented it, Sally was secretly amused by this notion of Peter's.



### *Chapter Three*

#### BIG SHADOW OVER LITTLE PEOPLE

##### 1

PETER and Sally never really saw The House. It served as a material peg on which they hung all the accumulated quaint longings of their youths. The House was the pinnacle of the shy dreams of Peter since he had been a homely, sensitive little boy with a rigorous conscience and a relentless sense of responsibility.

The House represented the culmination of Sally's wildest reveries, when she had stitched and basted flowers and velvet and painted glass grapes on the hats she used to create in the basement of Mrs. Gerber's Millinery Parlor.

Sally never could make herself see that it was a square, box-like, ridiculous little house, with five windows and a door geometrically squared on its front, like the houses children draw on slates. She never appreciated that the immense, shiny stone in the tiny front yard—affectionately christened "The Camel" because of its humpiness—was a disfiguring rock the builders had not gone to the expense of removing. It was a lawn ornament to Sally, about which she visioned vines and a garden. No, The House to Sally was all the delicious pictures of houses she had ever seen rolled

into one, and belonging miraculously to her and Peter. Too wonderful to believe!

Peter's viewpoint, though a little less obscured by lovely illusions, was just as worshipful. But his feelings were tinged with masculine responsibility. He owned land now. A section of the earth belonged to him. He knew it extended down to China; he suspected it touched the stars and the doorstep of Heaven. Sally, their two children, a piece of land and a house depended upon him for their maintenance! He was enrolled in the World of Things; they credited him on the books with so-and-so, and it was up to him to make good.

Peter came by his responsibilities honestly, from the jovial, melancholy old Norse agriculturists from whom he descended. He knew nothing about them, but they cried loudly within him—winged him with visions, shackled him with duties that he could never understand.

## 2

Because Peter's father had never been shackled, the links were forged all the heavier for Peter. Joles Lauren, wandering about somewhere with a blowsy hairdresser at the moment Peter was buying The House, knew nothing of the tyranny of duties.

Peter used to think of him often—of his bright, innocent eyes, blue as the sky of his old Norway, of the slow, humorous way he talked, with a sly double meaning the children sometimes caught but did not

understand. He used to sing loud songs at night on the doorstep, at rare times when he spent the evening with the quiet, cold woman who was Peter's mother.

He was a trader by profession, Joles Lauren, forever inflamed with a gambler's optimism of "something for nothing." Some new project always hung in the air. He was elated over some trade he was about to put through, or dejected about some deal on which he had been "done."

"Well, better luck again," he used to say cheerfully, after he had served what he considered the proper time in remorse over money lost. "Yust watch me. I got plan to beat that old Yimmy Cohen," he would chuckle, rubbing his smooth, fastidious hands on the exaggerated lapels of the black-and-white striped suit he adored.

He bought a new suit every time he had a "big deal" under way—gray suits with slanting pockets bound in black braid, checked suits, salt-and-pepper, with vests of substantiating elegance. His neckties, worn with high, stiff collars, rivaled his wife's dooryard garden for brilliance.

The yard of the Lauren house in the little Iowa town was the neighborhood museum. Variety kindled Joles' imagination, and he sometimes included articles in his trades for their very grotesquery. An old hearse, with moth-eaten plumes and nickel-plated angels trumpeting silent dirges as they held the kerosene headlights, stood in the yard for years.

Every once in a while it was moved from its place and driven by Joles himself, with the children of the



neighborhood trailing along, to some enterprising undertaker's establishment. But it always came back. Joles would display it grandly to his prospective customer, and then grow angry and shout and gesticulate, while the accompanying band of boys applauded gleefully.

"Well, I wouldn't sell it to ya now, ya old thick-head. Yust like a Swede—don' know nuthin' about style anyway," Joles would fling into the air, as he climbed to the driver's seat and drove majestically away.

One day, when Joles had had just enough to drink to make him benevolent and gentle, he organized a party of youngsters who had no money to attend the fair in a nearby town, and drove them out in the hearse. Some of them sat on top, shouting and tickling the round stomachs of the nickel-plated angels, but most of them crowded into the glass-enclosed body, grinning and thumbing their noses at the populace they passed. The hearse from that time on became the neighborhood carryall, and Joles was better pleased than he would have been if it had been sold to roll with dreary dignity at the head of a funeral procession.

Old books, farm implements, furniture, doctors' instruments, a set of simpering waxen ladies from a fashion showroom, old stoves, and stage scenery made up the equipment of the Lauren establishment.

Joles was immensely popular, and it was the general belief of the neighborhood that his straight-haired, quiet wife, Magnold, "held him down". She had a

silent scorn for his dealings; she never went out to look at his heterogeneous display if she could help it.

When Joles' friends came to visit him—telling loud stories around the fat black stove in the sitting room—Magnold would appear at the door and look at them coolly for a moment before disappearing. Almost instantly they fumbled for their hats and left. Joles would stride out into the kitchen, where she sat mending innumerable thick stockings for the boys, and boom at her angrily:

“Yust because you don' like nothin', you don' hafta come in and break up my friends,” he'd shout, pounding on the table with his fist, growing red as to face and narrow as to blue Norse eyes. Magnold would say nothing. That was the maddening secret she had mastered in dealing with this tempestuous happy-go-lucky.

### 3

In later years, when the boys were almost grown, and Joles had brought the hairdresser home one Sunday, thinking that Magnold had gone to church, she still said nothing.

He came home to pack his elaborate wardrobe to leave for an unhallowed honeymoon with the hairdresser. They came in laughing and maudlin. The hairdresser, whose name Magnold scorned to learn, sat in the kitchen, wearing her purple chiffon hat high on her artificially blonde pompadour, and toasting her pointed slippers at the kitchen stove.

Joles cut her a slice of Magnold's fragrant spice cake, and she consumed it noisily, brushing the crumbs from the billowy lace of her modishly high bosom.

Magnold came silently to the door, her large gingham apron held like a bag before her, filled with rags for the rug she was making. The expression of her face altered not at all. Joles, kneeling before a large clothes hamper, crimsoned; the veins at his temples swelled and seemed to crawl.

"Wot ya doin' here, ya Wooden Indian?" he shouted. "Don't try to stop me. Tend to your own damn business, now. Yust keep still."

The hairdresser dropped her kid slippers to the floor with a thud and began whimpering.

"We oughtn' go, Joles," she sniffled.

"Yeh, we're goin'! That old Wooden Indian can't do nothin' about it," he said, slamming the lid on the hamper, but not taking his eyes from Magnold's still face. She looked at him a moment from her impassive eyes, then turned and went back upstairs.

When the boys came home from obligatory Sunday school, their dinner was unprepared, for the first time in their lives. Their mother was busy with her rag rug. Magnold, who believed it consummate sin to sew on the Sabbath! She was too industrious to waste the time, though, so she obeyed her literal translation of the law, by only cutting strips and never wielding a Sabbath needle.

"Your father's gone away," she said, when they looked in the door and began amazed questions. "It's all right, though. I'll have your dinner pretty soon."

That was all. She never mentioned it again as long as she lived.

Peter learned of the hairdresser from the neighbors, but no one ever dared speak to Magnold of Joles' disappearance. Magnold was like that.

The routine of her house changed little. For years she had managed somehow to keep things running smoothly between the bursts of Joles' alternate good nature and anger. The boys had looked upon him as an exciting boarder who lived at their house with no restrictions. He might come in at any hour of the night and bluster into their room, whispering loudly, "Hey, boys—Joles! What say we have something to eat!"

The three of them would tumble out of bed and go with him down to the kitchen, shivering with delight in the shadow of his privilege. Joles would put on the big pot of coffee with hospitable nonchalance and violate the white chasteness of the cake Magnold had baked for the next day. Great slabs of it he would cut and pass out to his sons with a careless generosity, laughing slyly all the time and retailing nefarious news.

They adored him with a surreptitious homage. It was one of the things that troubled Peter most in his boyhood, that he found his unreliable father, who was so selfish and ill-natured, more interesting than his good, self-sacrificing mother, who never caressed or flattered him, but whose honest face shone with patience and consideration.

Their father was always "Joles" to them, and they

considered him "company," who might upset and inconvenience the household, but who could be depended upon never to leave it dull.

They missed him sadly, in those first weeks after his departure, half expecting him to come back and hoping that he would. Peter's two older brothers used to whisper about him after they went to bed, speculating on what he was doing, and telling each other highly embellished versions of adventures they had had with him. As months went by, Joles became a gilded hero.

Peter himself, bound by some vague loyalty to his mother, refused to discuss Joles with the other boys. His attitude was a miniature of Magnold's.

## 4

Summers now were spent working, and only a few more winters of school were possible. Magnold did exquisite embroidery for an "art store." But little by little she had to give it up. Her fine gray eyes were dulling, and she was the sort of stark peasant who would not tolerate glasses. Having her eyes tested for spectacles never occurred to her. She felt meekly that the man at the "art store" was merely growing more difficult to please, and that the patterns he gave her to do were becoming more intricate. Whereas she used to be able in seventeen hours' work to finish a nightgown, so filmy and beautiful in material that she felt it must be a snare of the devil, it now took her nearly twenty-seven.



Sometimes in the summer she went to the farms with the boys, working in the fields from dawn to sunset, and sitting in the moonlight with the other workers, singing strange, throaty Nordic songs Peter never had heard before. The farm people had known her when she was a girl in Norway; they shared grim, colorful memories seldom voiced for the young people. Peter had an acute sense of repressed drama when he was with them.

Magnold was a different woman in the fields. As she braced her knees and swung her body, tossing sheaves into a wagon, her powerful form balanced like a marvelous pendulum from the waist. Her straight, fine hair, parted in the middle and coiled plainly at her neck, loosened and framed her gaunt face like strong wings. Her eyes grew bright with excitement; a dash of crimson flamed on her high cheek bones. Her throat, soft and almost as unwrinkled as a girl's, was bare, and her sleeves were rolled nearly to her shoulders.

When the wind whipped her skirts about her powerful limbs, and she tilted her chin and narrowed her eyes to meet it, it was easy to see why the Norsemen had carved a woman's heroic figure on the prow of their vessels. Peter felt something invincible about his mother those days—his mother, baffling and mysteriously aloof from common experience.

Ben and Louis left home when they were eighteen and twenty years old, to go to work in a foundry a hundred miles away. Peter was glad he was too young to go with them; he felt someone should stay at home

with their mother, although Magnold—who was in frame bigger than any of her children at this time—was as competent to look after herself as a man. She had the uncorseted strength of the women of her race; she could draw a bucket of water with swifter strokes than could the boys. Two buckets she could carry up the steps to the house with an easy grace that Peter admired, as he grew older.

After the other boys left, Peter and Magnold lived alone. These were the most placid days of Peter's life. He was "learning his trade." Magnold was immensely proud of that. She consecrated herself to Peter's trade, although she was only dimly aware of what it meant.

Life, she told herself, was different now; everyone was dependent on everyone else for living. She had grown up when every family made the things necessary to their existence with their own bare hands, with tools they, themselves, fashioned.

Now it was different. Peter spent all of his days making little bolts to fasten the end of a steel rod. Other men, far away, were turning out slabs of iron, and hinges of steel and coils of brass. Eventually they would all come together, and from the work of all of them would be stoves, and the mowing machines that delighted her, and machinery to make furniture.

She was greatly impressed. It made Peter seem very important to her. This making of bolts that kept him away from her all day and sent him home on his bicycle at night, tired and a little grimy, became to her a gesture in a great pageant.

She never tired of hearing of the noisy shop—of the belts that whirled and hummed, driving great wheels that worked little jaws to bite nicks in the steel. Peter drew her diagrams while they ate their supper, and she kept them, scrawled and scratchy, on the backs of envelopes, and studied them over during the day. In the afternoon, when women brought their sewing to rock and chat, she got them out and tried to explain their importance. The feeling of the drama of industrialism was inarticulate within her, and she made feeble, grotesque attempts to explain it.

During this period she and Peter grew closer than she had ever been with anyone. Almost, she could have spoken to him of that Sunday morning. But there seemed nothing to say. She used to tell him of the fishing village where she had grown up, and of the dashing Joles who used to play jokes on her father, and bring gifts to her mother. She could tell him about that Joles, because he was someone else of little consequence to her.

While he was growing up, Peter watched himself vigilantly for any menacing indication of Joles in him. He allowed himself no indulgence or weakness—his self-discipline was merciless. His ignorantly exaggerated opinion of the danger of inherited weakness of character haunted him.



## *Chapter Four*

### THE WIFE OF A DIPLOMAT

#### 1

SALLY lived on the other side of the town. Sally's father was a minister, and her mother a vivacious, sweet-eyed little woman who wore her shabbiness as though it were a whimsical ornament she affected for the moment. She had brown hair much like Sally's, that curled about her low forehead, and a dimple that seemed an impudence in the cheek of a minister's wife. She taught the young men's Bible Class, and it was from Sally's mother that many of the devout Methodist boys gained their first glimpse of the technique of flirting.

It was a popular class. One of the boys from the shop invited Peter to attend, and it was thus, dressed decorously in his best black suit, and holding his frayed work cap in his hands—because he had no other cap at the time—that Peter walked into Sally's life, and into a new appreciation of life.

Mrs. Graves was a revelation to him. There was a breathless joy about the little woman that was unbelievable to Peter. A fugitive instinct from his father's irresponsible way of enjoying whatever life he found, stirred at sight of this woman. She seemed not at all apologetic about happiness and beauty. The frankness

of her light-heartedness overwhelmed Peter, accustomed to regard life as a serious proposition, and joy as something not quite respectable—like the sheer nightgowns Magnold embroidered.

Something of this fascination Mrs. Graves sensed in the homely, shy lad, and invited him home to dinner. Peter was too overcome with timidity to accept the first time, and the second; but before the third invitation he had seen Sally!

From that time, Peter was doomed. Sally, in her cheap little fur jacket and crimson wool gown, with her smart little hat topping her sleek, brown curls, was the loveliest and at the same time the most wholesome being Peter had ever seen. She was an improvisation of her vivacious mother in a minor key, keeping Peter's conscience appeased and yet exhilarating his imagination.

Years later little Nancy and Eric loved to hear Mother tell how Daddy had come with Grandma to dinner, so he could know Sally. Sally liked to tell this story in Peter's presence so she could watch his sheepish merriment while she imitated his discomfiture when Grandma teased him.

## 2

Magnold liked Sally, but she was ill at ease with her. She wished she could watch her Peter and this radiant girl playing together when they didn't see her. She wanted passionately to tell the girl that Peter needed merriment and joy, because of his father that



was in him and because of his mother whose inarticulate hunger was so cruel in its demands.

But she could not frame her words. Sally came to dinner at Peter's house sometimes, straight from Mrs. Gerber's Millinery Parlor. Her round white fingers were needle-pricked, and her talk was all of velvets and styles, and she found big, silent Magnold a little disconcerting. But Magnold somehow conveyed to her that she approved the gay plaid silk waist she wore, liked her smooth curls, and her dainty feet.

Sally loved to ask about Peter's little-boyhood, and the funny little things he said when he was a baby. Peter's mother was a proud woman at those times, but she held her pride at tight rein.

"He was a good baby, but slow walkin'," she said sternly. "His father thought he wasn't right because he couldn't talk or walk when he was thirteen months old. It was because he was so fat," she explained in her toneless way. "He knows how to work—he always knew how to work. Louis and Benny used to sneak around behind the woodpile to rest, when they were sawing. Peter did their work for them."

She showed Sally Peter's heart-breakingly meagre toys, kept in a cigar box, lined with leather cut from an old hunting jacket Joles had bought for an outing. There was a small china dog, with painted eyes and a black tail like a wrinkled raisin. He was a patient small dog, sitting up on his hind feet in eternal pleading. Sally often thought of him in the years after and wondered if something of the china dog's patience hadn't been absorbed by Peter.

There was, besides the dog, a pearl-handled knife in the box, and a large glass marble with colored stripes twisted within, an engraved card bearing white roses and lilies in wreathes, which said in gilt letters, "I solemnly swear never to use alcoholic liquors, in any way, shape or form. I purpose to keep this pledge, throughout my life, God helping me." Under this, written in a bold, boyish hand, was "Peter Lauren." The date was February 8, 1889—when Peter was fourteen years old.

"Peter's a good boy," Magnold said. She wanted to warn this other woman who was to go with Peter through his days that he needed mirth and lightness and a knowledge of how to play at life a little bit. But she had no words.

### 3

After they were married, Sally and Peter went to live in Kansas City, while Peter continued serving his apprenticeship. They had a square, large room in a boarding house, and Sally spent each day waiting for Peter to come home and planning the sort of house they'd have some day when they could afford one. She went shopping and visited the public library, always to learn the latest things in furniture and the hundred droll little tricks of making old things new, and new things more expensive looking. She was learning her trade too, she felt.

They never lived at Magnold's house, nor at the Graves' parsonage. Magnold and the Graves, in their

separate ways, were wise enough to keep the home desire unblunted until Sally and Peter could make their own place.

That had taken longer than they hoped. Furnished rooms and unfurnished flats had been their portion throughout the years while they were saving their pitiful little allotment from Peter's earnings. Eric and little Nancy had come, and a life insurance policy had to be taken out. Peter was serious these years; responsibility sat heavily on his earnest young brow. Even Sally, indomitably optimistic to all appearances, found herself wondering whether The House would ever materialize.

She and Peter made elaborate budgets and lived up to them rigidly. Peter carried sandwiches and fruit to the shop and even denied himself hot coffee at noon, because the nickel that appeared unimportant made thirty cents in a week, when it hobnobbed with other nickels.

For amusement they went for long walks on Sunday, and Sally worked out little picnic lunches, made from the left-overs of Saturday's dinner. They were absurdly happy and high-hearted. They wrote valorous letters to the Graves, and Peter wrote carefully non-committal ones to his mother. Magnold couldn't read English, and Peter couldn't write Norwegian, and he felt the young Suter girls who translated Magnold's mail were apt to be facetious about the information they picked up in this way. Sometimes Magnold sent Sally and Peter and the children letters written waveringly on a tablet sheet of cheap paper. Peter would

pretend that he could read these letters, picking out the words and using his imagination to fit them to some memory he had of the Norwegian words his mother used. This delighted the children immensely, but Sally found these infrequent letters pathetic. Although Peter was unusually gay after receiving one, she felt they hurt him a little—as they hurt her.

Nancy and Eric loved to talk about their Grandmas. Eric pretended that he remembered them, and for Nancy's benefit used to improvise on the stories Peter told him. He had been but two years old when they left the city where the Grandmas lived, but that hindered his memory not at all. After a time little Nancy began remembering them too.

When Eric was five and Nancy three, Sally and Peter moved to Washington, D. C. Peter took a Civil Service examination and received an appointment at a low salary in the Navy Department.

"My husband's received a government appointment. We're leaving for Washington next week," Sally told the grocer, trying to be nonchalant. It was evident from her tone that the appointment was second in importance only to that of Secretary of State. The grocer seemed tremendously pleased that he had had the patronage of such distinguished people.

"Well," he said, "that's fine! Don't think I ever saw your husband. Kindova oldish man?"

"Oh, no, but he's very capable," Sally explained. "This appointment was made on a com-pet-i-tive examination." She paid her respects to every syllable of the glory-giving word.

All up and down the street where Magnold lived the word was passed that Peter had a fine place in the Government. Sally herself had written the letter the Suter girls were to read. The word competitive figured in it three times. Sally told her mother-in-law that she was busy planning some new clothes for herself, so she could take up her responsibilities as Peter's wife.

That silenced the Suters completely. Magnold herself missed that line of the letter in remembering how Peter used to usurp the woodpile while Benny and Louis played mumblepeg, or dozed in the sun with their old hats pulled over their faces.

## 4

If the social responsibilities might have seemed trivial to another woman, they were sufficient to delight Sally. They had been in Washington only three weeks when the assistant head of Peter's department entertained them at dinner in his furnished flat. Sally sewed a remnant of a diamond earring of her mother's on a velvet band and wore it around her throat in a way she had seen in the pictures of diplomatic matrons in the Sunday papers. She wore also a rustling green taffeta gown she had been making by hand during the last three weeks, whenever she could spare a moment from the children. Peter was proud of her.

The Stones were slightly disappointing. Mrs. Stone played the piano in a moving picture theatre—a "five-cent-show." She passed toothpicks after dinner and



told Sally about a flirtation she was having with a man who ran the projector at the "show." Stone himself was a tired looking, serious chap, glad of someone as interested as Peter to talk with of his work. He spent the evening "wising up" Peter on the unfairness of the promotion system in the department.

"Y'gotta have a pull to get anywhere in this joint," Sally heard him say. "Old man Barnes took a likin' to me, but since he died I ain't had a chanct to get any further. Graham was promoted right over my head, and not a word said. How's that for a how-d'ye-do?"

Sally wrote to Magnold—and the neighborhood, via the Suter megaphone: "There is a great deal of fastness in society here. You would be surprised at the way perfectly nice people carry on. I have heard about the way society people flirt with each other's husbands and wives, but I did not believe it. At a dinner party given in our honor the other evening, I heard a woman actually bragging that she was flirting with another man.

"The inside workings of politics are interesting as we see them. Favoritism seems to play a great part, but I suppose that is to be expected where a few men have so much authority." Peter never saw this letter.



## *Chapter Five*

### PEOPLE WHO HAVE NO HOUSES

#### 1

AFTER they had been in Washington a few months, Peter learned about the Building Association. Stone, who had hoped weakly to buy a house, but hadn't been able to save for the start, told him about it.

"All you hafta have is a few hundred to start with, and then you can pay the rest like rent—so much a month," he explained. He wanted *The House* for Peter almost as earnestly as he had wanted one of his own. He had made a sort of symbol of it in his mind. If he had had a house, he used to think, things would have been different with May.

"I wouldn't worry about ever losin' my job if I had a house. Fella's got a house, he's sorta sure of a place in the world," he often said.

Stone was always bringing in clippings from the real estate news columns and showing them to Peter.

"That'd be pretty good for you, Lauren. You could take a man and his wife in if 'twas too big—that would help out with the payments a lot. 'Course you hafta be careful who you get in."

When Sally and Peter found *The House*, they took Stone to see it. He went about, tapping the walls expertly, and sniffing at the gas fixtures. He poked

around the drafts of the little hot-air furnace and insisted on climbing through the skylight to see that the roof was all right. He intimated that buying houses was one of the things he did best, and warned Peter about this and that.

Sally was a bit provoked at this intrusion, but Peter felt sorry for the big, bald-headed man, who worked so hard, yet was so curiously inefficient about his life.

"What difference does it make? He thinks he's helpin', and he gets a lot of fun out of it. He ain't ever owned anything himself, and he's tryin' to see what it'd feel like," Peter said to Sally.

"But this is our house, and it's none of his business how much we have to pay each month. It's nervy of him to go pryin' into our business," Sally replied.

But she really didn't mind. It was so wonderful owning something at last with Peter, feeling secure in the world and making this place for themselves, that nothing else counted much. She had so much happiness, she could afford to splash a little of it over the side to the people below.

## 2

There are so many things needed to furnish a house besides love and long-protracted desire. Sally had dozens of little dainty things ready, saved by some miracle from the frugal days when she and Peter had to count every penny and extract its full value before it passed on into the world.

Lovingly Peter had made burnished candlesticks

from wood, turned and artistically formed on the lathe. He made a footstool for Sally's small feet, upholstered in leather, with hand carved legs. He made a potato masher, too, and a rolling pin with a carved caricature of Sally making pies, to decorate the ends.

New wall paper all over the house was thrown into the bargain by the former owners of The House. Sally, in an ecstasy of indecision, made choice after choice from sample books the paper hanger submitted. Every time Peter came home she had changed her decision, hanging deliciously between six papers for the "drawing room," and three for the dining room. The green was genteel but would fade; the bronze was elegant, but suggested cheap gold in some lights; the striped, leather-looking paper had wonderful character, but was expensive. Even Nancy and Eric had their choices, and discussed them as they played.

For their playroom, there was wonderful "comic sheet" paper, with their favorite characters cavorting joyously through many adventures. This was Sally's especial delight.

Sally and the children cut the border for the wall paper, because the paper hanger charged a cent a foot. They made a game of it, snipping carefully around the fruit and flowers with Sally's manicure scissors, and feeling important, because they were helping with The House.

### 3

Gingham curtains at the kitchen windows, scarlet

geraniums blooming in a little box on the window sill, scalloped yellow paper on the sunny pantry shelves, and Sally's cheap little rosebud dishes perching proudly on the walls. The teacups dangled from the shelves like extravagant earrings on display. Sally's clock on the shelf ticked primly, marking off the well ordered hours. That was the Lauren kitchen.

The other dooryards on Sally's street were neat, but no hopes were lavished on them. They were small—not much larger than the rug on Sally's "drawing room" floor, and their owners kept them sown with grass, borrowed the Kellys' hose and passed it up and down the street, sprinkling the lawns.

But Sally had ambitions for her lawn. She never realized that it was the most handicapped of them all, with the big, disfiguring stone in the middle, and hard clay soil that produced but reluctant grass. She made water color sketches of her garden plans and worked them out as seriously as though the inches were acres.

One morning when the sod on the vacant lots was beginning to show polka dots of dandelion, the children took their express wagon and a hatchet and went with Sally seeking sod. They cut neat squares of grass and piled them on the wagon and pieced them around the great rock. On Sunday they went for a street car ride along the canal and brought back baby spruce trees, which Peter banked formally in corners of the yard.

Hollyhocks barricaded the low iron fence and in a few years furnished a splendid new game for the neighborhood children. The crisp white and pink and mauve flowers Sally made into lovely ladies with



sweet peas pinned on for heads and slender string beans for green limbs under their fluffy skirts. Nancy made a cast of actors and actresses from the hollyhocks and the vegetables from the garden in the back yard and gave a romantic play one afternoon. . . .



## *Chapter Six*

### KNOW A WOMAN BY HER SHOPPING

#### I

SALLY Lauren was soon the leader of the neighborhood. She loved to think of it—an “influence for progress” she called it proudly to herself. Of course the neighbors didn’t realize they were revolving around her. If they dropped into her small, sunny, dining room more often than they stepped into each other’s houses, it was because she offered them sweet little oatmeal cookies and weak chocolate, flavored with vanilla or cinnamon. Mrs. Lauren’s house was always ready for callers, even in the zero hour on Monday, when the tubs in the cellar hadn’t been emptied of their wash water, and the ring made from the blueing bottle hadn’t dried on the bench in the back yard.

Sally was always delighted when she saw Mrs. Burgess or Mrs. Kelly appearing at her high, whitewashed back gate, wearing the lace and ribbon “boodwar” caps with which they covered their hair curlers until afternoon. Sally never wore a “boodwar” cap. Peter thought them “messy.” How she would have enjoyed one if he had liked them.

Of course, she had no hair curlers to cover. Since she had been married she no longer wore her curls clustered at the crown of her head. Peter thought it

more appropriate for her hair to be brushed softly back from her broad, white brow and piled neatly, high on her small round head. Occasionally she experimented with new styles, coiling it fluffily at her neck and pulling the masses of it over her ears, but Peter always joked about it, or told her fondly that it was "common", and that he liked his girl to have dignity. She felt it would have been younger looking to have it dressed more softly, but Peter's pleasure was worth more to her than her own appearance. She didn't even stop to bargain over the values in her mind.

When the Laurens moved to The House on Second Street, there was a fierce neighborhood feud waging between the Burgesses on the right and the Kellys on the left. It had started in the Round House, where the respective husbands worked. Joe Kelly had been called down by the foreman for something that was Jim Burgess' fault. The men had long ago forgotten their quarrel, but their wives squabbled tirelessly across the back fences, finally ceasing to speak to each other. Mrs. Kelly no longer spoke to the Briggs family because they were friends of the Burgesses, and Mrs. Burgess had withdrawn her patronage from Lamb's store because she so often met Mrs. Kelly there.

Sally's position was strategic. If she and Mrs. Burgess exchanged recipes in the morning, Mrs. Kelly hurried over in the afternoon with a bowl of junket to give her, and a dish of gossip advice to share. Since Sally made it clear that she intended to remain neutral, her position became the bone of contention.

But the Fulton Friendly Club brought peace into the community. Sally brought the Club into the lives and onto the pantry shelves of the Second Street women. Her motive for organizing the Fulton Friendly Club wasn't entirely social. She needed a rug for her bedroom, and Peter couldn't possibly spare even the tiniest amount per week from his slim envelope at the Navy Yard.

She oiled the floor in their little bedroom and pounced with glee upon the pictures in her household magazines of cool looking bedrooms devoid of rugs. But the bare sound of Peter's shoes, as he strode about at midnight after the night shift, was hateful to her.

"That's my symbol for poverty," she told herself rebelliously. But to Peter she merely smiled and warned him not to wake the neighbors. They hadn't been keeping house long enough to have accumulated discarded clothing from which to make rag rugs, and besides, Sally wouldn't have torn good clothing into strips, no matter how antiquated their cut.

So the Fulton Friendly Club offered a glorious solution. You simply interested ten women in ordering one dollar's worth of merchandise each month for ten months. Every month one member was allowed to select a premium worth five dollars, or to save her premium stamps for a more pretentious piece of furniture. The secretary was allowed ten dollars' worth of premium stamps for her transactions.

Neatly written notes invited Sally's neighbors to

come to tea in the funny little box she called her "drawing room." Dressed in a pale green organdie that made her dumpy figure almost doll-like in its daintiness, Sally met them and explained the Fulton Friendly System. They felt, furtively, that this must be some plan to "beat" them, but since they could detect no flaw, they all came in.

Once a month Sally and her children "played store" on the shining linoleum of the kitchen.

"Mother, the Fulton man's here," Nancy and Eric would come screaming into the house, when they saw the express van drawn up. Sally would hurry out—her little figure crisp in gingham—and instruct the driver to be careful about the hall paper. One month, she told him, the paper got badly scraped and she had to touch it up with the children's water colors.

The box had to be opened with a hatchet, and Eric burned with impatience because his mother hacked and strained and bit her lip, while he was certain he could have opened it with one blow.

"I may have to leave this till Daddy gets home," Sally threatened between set teeth, while the fresh, rough boards gave out splintery protests as she tore at them. But always she conquered, and the box surrendered in a shower of chips and gleaming ends of nails. A smell of soap and spice and fresh, uncooked cereals arose in the most delicious manner. Nancy used to close her eyes and breathe in deeply. It was like passing a woman dressed in silk and perfume, Thanksgiving morning, sun on a wagon of clean straw.



Distributing the orders was jolly business. You could sort of tell what the women themselves were like when you put up their orders, Sally thought. Mrs. Kelly, mother of four boys, around whom life revolved with smug monotony, ordered a canned tongue—for their sandwiches—shaving soap, for Jerry's fledgling beard, hominy grits, for the Old Man's unvarying Southern breakfast, laundry soap, for blue, grimy shirts, a roll of tar tape, for bicycle tires and baseballs to be mended.

Mrs. Burgess, who looked upon housekeeping as a passionate ministry, was forever experimenting with new and elaborate recipes. Her children were underfed and nervous, and Mrs. Kelly declared stoutly that it was because she was always feeding them such awful mixtures of food.

"No child's stomach can stand all the excitement that woman puts into it," she said. "I wish you'd see the salads she makes. Nothing but salad for dinner, and some crazy desert that's enough to send you into hysterics to look at it! No wonder they don't get along in school! Always cryin' and fightin' on the street! Children's stomachs are connected up with their brains. If you want 'em to be smart, you hafta feed 'em smart food."

But bizarre food was Mrs. Burgess' principal joy in life. She ordered canned crab meat, and scarlet pimentos, and snappy cheese, and canned tamales. One week her bottle of tabasco sauce broke in the box and

flavored everybody's soap and cinnamon and laundry starch. Such a mess! And just like the good-hearted little woman's possessions to ruin everybody else's order!

Mrs. Swan, who had been asked to join as a last resort, to fill out the ten members, never participated in the sport with which the other members received and gave their orders. Mrs. Swan and the neighbors of Second Street regarded each other with mutual hostility and scorn.

She had no visible means of support, and she never mentioned her husband. He might have been dead, but then again his absence might not have been so well accounted for. As though that weren't bad enough, she frequently entertained men! This was passed back and forth across the back fences in capital letter whispers.

"D'j'ya see Mrs. Swan's friend last night?" Mrs. Kelly inquired meaningly. "Sorta foreign lookin'—wouldn't be a bit surprised if he was French. Young, too. She went out to the curb with him and talked while he was startin' his car, laughin' and everything."

Mrs. Swan's order made a neat little package always—complexion cream in a lovely little jar with roses on the cover, orange sticks, chastely slender and fragrant smelling if you held them close to your nose, conserved ginger that came packed in a little black casket with vermilion Chinese writing on the top, flower seeds rattling gaily in their envelopes, and bath salts. Sally felt a strange loyalty towards Mrs. Swan's order. She never divulged its frivolous secrets to the

neighbors. The bath salts were too deliciously naughty even to tell Peter about.

"Who's that dark-haired woman down the street, with all the wistaria growin' over her doorway?" Peter had asked her once. "She smiles at me as I come by. Had on a pink dress, diggin' in her garden. I don't like to see a woman wearin' a thin dress like that and diggin' out in the open when the men are comin' past from the Yard. Looks bad."

"That's Mrs. Swan," Sally said briefly. No need to tell him what the neighbors said about the men who came so frequently to her house. Peter wouldn't like to know about such things.

## 4

But they didn't miss Mrs. Swan at the monthly teas and luncheons of the Fulton Friendly Club. They were very gay without her, and everyone looked forward from one meeting to the next. It made the year go quite fast, they said.

At the beginning each member drew a number from a bowl in which little papers had been mixed, and that number represented her turn to give the party and receive her premium. She could make her party an evening affair if she chose and invite the men-folks, or she could have it just a tea—no one but Sally had the courage to call them "teas"—or a luncheon. It was found after two rather awkward attempts that the men-folks didn't join in the parties as congenially as did the "girls"; so most of them had their affairs in the

afternoon, when they were free to be as fussy and silly as they pleased, without being embarrassed and constrained before the men.

At these parties each member received her order, and the hostess often found some ingenious way of delivering it to its recipient. Strings were wound all over Mrs. Drake's house, under the piano, tangled in the chandelier, through the keyhole of the pantry door, under the sink and thence to the cellar, where with much screaming and merriment Mrs. Burgess found her spices and sauces, and Mrs. Kelly her laundry soap. Everyone had a good time following her string, and everyone carried the neatly wound, vari-colored balls home as souvenirs. It was little things like that that made a party "different", Mrs. Drake said modestly.

Mrs. Pratt made everyone do a "stunt" before she could receive her order, and somewhere, scattered in shabby little corners of the world, nine middle-aged women still laugh and tell people they know about Mrs. Kelly's interpretation of an old Virginia darky doing a clog dance, when she revolved her lower jaw collecting saliva, and actually spat on Mrs. Pratt's parlor rug. Nobody thought she had it in her!

Often these occasions took on an erudite tone, as when Sally suggested that each member select one thing she had ordered and write a brief paper on the history of that product. Housewives could put more romance into their work if they understood where tapioca comes from, and if they knew how soap is made, Sally believed. And besides, it gave such an air of refinement to a club to have the members preparing

papers. The members were rather sheepish at first, but gradually they became cocky about it, holding it up to their children as an example of the importance of education.

The Fulton Friendly Club gradually became the "influence for progress" and welfare in the neighborhood. Never having belonged to clubs before, the members assigned to it all the legendary ethics they had heard attributed to other orders.

"Fultonism" was the word they applied to this ethical force, which included an amazing variety of things, from the way one paid back what one borrowed to how one apportioned one's husband's salary. Even clothes, and the matter of dressing one's hair, came under the imaginary statutes of the order.

"It is the privilege of everyone who is interested in spreading the ideals of Fultonism, to make the most of her appearance and to be as charming as possible without sacrificing the equally important virtues," Sally Lauren said in the introduction to her paper in which she traced the evolution of the present day sleeve. They made quite a cult of Fultonism, living up to ideals of housewifery which the two Yiddish gentlemen who devised the Fulton Friendly Plan would have been amazed to know existed.

Eric was taken in as the club mascot, and allowed to deliver the orders from his mother's back door to whatever house was holding the meeting each month. In addition to this honor, he was permitted to wear Sally's Fulton Friendly pin, and to have a hand-out of "refreshments" at each meeting. He was proud of being



allowed to wear Sally's pin—a waving flag with two gold “F’s” blazoned upon it.

But a big boy from a street across the park, where Fultonism was not so happily known, taunted him with belonging to a “lady’s club.” For a few days life became a nightmare of screaming, derisive little demons, who shouted “Fancy Florence” whenever he appeared.

That was why he wouldn’t join the Masons twenty years later. And Peter was so proud of the honor of having him invited!



## *Chapter Seven*

### ANYTHING MIGHT HAPPEN

#### 1

ONE of the reasons few people are happy is that they don't recognize happiness until it has passed. Those days on Second Street, when Nancy and Eric were growing up, full of curiosity and extravagant plans for what would happen when they were "big", were happy. Almost anything was possible, they felt, and Sally encouraged them to feel it.

"But it's so hard on youngsters to discover that life isn't a fairy tale exactly," Peter often reminded her. "Like when I was a kid—if they'd told me my father and mother gave me my Christmas, I wouldn't expected much and woulda been tickled to death with what I found. But Christmas morning was always awfully uncomfortable for me because I wanted my mother not to know I felt bad about the mittens she knitted for me. Life's a good deal the same. It's pretty nice and wonderful if you're contented with what you have, but if you're expecting miracles, you're bound to get disappointed."

Sally was firm in her belief in wonders. "But, darling, you ought to know that half the fun for them is dreaming that anything can happen. Suppose they do think we're all going to Europe some day and travel

around for months and months, eating ice cream and olives, and riding on donkeys like the postcards Dr. Stone sent from Yellowstone Park. They'll have the fun of imagining it, and there'd be no fun if we told them it probably will never happen."

"Well, I hope I'm around to pick up the pieces when they get their bumps," said Peter, hoping Sally would feel guilty enough to relieve him of the necessity of tethering these children to earth.

## 2

Twice a week Sally and the children went to the country. Sometimes the country meant only the little park near their house. But they all had active imaginations, and it was not difficult to shut out the rest of the world.

Hucksters bawling the merit of their peaches and tomatoes, and lazily flicking flies from their sleepy horses' backs, stared at the three of them as they played their games. Other children, whose mothers were unacquainted with the "Constructive Play Course", of which Sally was so proud, drew near and waited shyly to be invited to join in the little dances and singing games.

Sally had taken the Constructive Play Course by mail, sending a little money order each month to pay for it. The little money order meant countless economies in a budget that was pinched as tight as anyone could have pinched it. But Sally felt it was worth the sacrifice to have Nancy and Eric "escape the curse of

mediocrity by having the blessing of constructive play at the mother's knee," as the prospectus promised.

There were games to encourage the imagination, and games to perfect the memory; games to train the sense of touch, and develop the sense of smell. Camels and chickens and boats with jaunty sails could be stenciled by small, unsteady fingers, and the course included hanks of brilliant worsted yarn with which to make mats of indefinite usefulness.

Trees and hills and fat little houses, with puffy smoke rolling from the chimneys, and clouds like whipped cream, were cut from bright paper and put together in astonishing landscapes. Nancy loved the smell of the library paste, and the suspense involved in pasting together the elements of their paper world. She liked putting wind in her pictures, and making sure that the little trees and the children's frocks and kites were all blowing in the same direction.

Sally kept the equipment in the top of her closet, getting out bits of it at a time, so that it was continually a surprise to the children. Even after they had grown up, they never passed their mother's closet without a feeling of some delicious mystery within.

There were songs that told of the development of pollywogs into frogs; dance songs to represent the metamorphosis of a caterpillar in his cocoon into a butterfly. They waved their chubby arms in circles as they spun the cocoon, huddled plump bodies in a soft ball on the floor; then slowly began to uncurl for a triumphant flight around the room. This brought inexplicable tears to Sally's eyes.

The songs were printed on small pink sheets, with gay little winged notes. Sally picked them out with her voice because she had no piano. Later, when they acquired a piano of which they were inordinately vain, they were astonished to find the tunes outlined by the notes quite different from those Sally had picked out and taught them. They were nice little tunes even so, and they continued to sing them "Mother's way."

## 3

Neither the shoemaker nor his children attempted to intrude on the sanctity of the street. They lived quietly in the small red house, huddled apologetically against the wall of the grocery store. When you went to the grocery store, you could hear the sharp blows of Mike's hammer and the staccato voices of Angie and her small brothers and the twins. Angie wanted so passionately to make them decent "Mericans".

When you took your shoes to Mike, the twins peeped around the cretonne curtains that separated the shop from the living quarters. Their eyes were round and solemn, and their black hair was matted and curly. The cretonne curtains trembled with the turbulence of the life that went on behind it, and couldn't conceal the scuffling reprimands of Angie's naturalizing.

Mike, courteous in his shiny-grimy leather apron, stood up when lady customers came in and mumbled his comprehension of instructions pleasantly.

"Nex' Frid'y," he promised, with a flash of his gleaming teeth under his small moustache, setting your



shoes on the shelf in the waiting row. Laborers' square-toed shoes, somebody's high-heeled kid slippers, with one buckle flapping, a little boy's muddy play-shoes, a pair of tired looking old man's shoes, patient and wrinkled, stood side by side.

Outside Mike's window, sunflowers twirled on their tall stalks, and flaming poppies blew scarlet petals over the fence into the sawdust of the grocery store steps. Angie raised tomatoes, too, and stately corn with leaves that fluttered like regatta flags. On the shelf of the shop was a milk bottle vase with a sunflower dozing limply.

The walls of the shop were gay with calendars advertising rubber heels and insurance and sole leather. If your shoes weren't ready when you called for them, you sat on the high, seldom-used shoe shining throne and admired the calendars and the one bright, framed picture of a mountain with a startling blue bay nestling at its feet. It was Mike's old home, you felt. Mike was an "Eyetalian."

The clock, like the one on the wall at school, ticked with ponderous footsteps, and in the room with the cretonne curtains you heard Angie rattling dishes and humming.

Angie was in your "room" at school, but she was big for her age. She sat in the last seat in the last row. Often she was late, because she had to cook and wash dishes before she came. Angie's mother worked.

Whenever Miss Martin gave the children a chance to select their reading lesson, Angie always raised her hand and asked for "The Poor Cobbler and The

Fairies." Everyone always giggled. But Miss Martin often let Angie read quite long passages of "The Cobbler". Angie hurried through them joyously, mispronouncing the words as she sipped their delight. She knew the story by heart, and sometimes she read it wrong.

"'For your kindness, you can have an'thing you want,' the Fairy said to the poor Cobbler," Angie proclaimed ecstatically. The book said "whatever" instead of "an'thing". Angie never remembered that.

But "an'thing" or "whatever", it was plain that the cobbler's reward gave Angie spiritual sustenance. Life might be hectic—what with twins and tomatoes—but it kept within the unfailing bounds of the rule of kindness and its certain reward.

Strange produce came from Angie's garden. One morning she brought Miss Martin the spiky corn tassel as a flower. Miss Martin gravely put it in a vase, but the children whispered and giggled. You burned with anger and shame for them, but not for Angie. You yearned for a moment to be an "Eyetalian", so you could talk to Angie about the blue bay under the mountain.

One evening, when you went for Father's working shoes, you saw Angie's mother. She was crouched on the stone at the door of the shop, pallid and beautiful in the dusk. She was young and tired, with Angie's large eyes, and a rippling wimple of smoke-like hair.

In the dim light she was embroidering, holding the white cloth delicately with long hands and bending her long throat to see the tiny stitches.

She wore a scarlet calico dress, open at the throat. There was an outline of her little, pointed breast. One of the twins was making her a crown of geranium leaves, with three pungent blossoms woven in. Angie's mother was singing with a full, impatient voice—a queer song, full of sad notes, and angry notes. But her eyes had an infinite, troubled patience. She rather frightened you. Though you went many times to the shop, you never saw Angie's mother again.

There were strange things about her absence. The grocer told Mother, and Mother told the next-door neighbor with that shy elation that betrays a mother's naughtiness. During the first days afterwards, while Angie was away from school, Miss Martin told the children they must never speak to Angie about her mother.

"It will be kinder for no one to mention her mother to Angie. She can't help it, and it will make her feel badly to be reminded of it," Miss Martin said, in her clear, sweet voice.

"What do they mean about Angie's mother?" you asked Eric. Eric laughed.

"She's run away with another Wop. Ole Eyetalians! She's gonna get married again to him, and leave Angie and Mike and the kids look after themselves." Eric thought it a good joke on Angie and the kids.

"Just like alley cats," said Father angrily, when he learned Mother knew about the neighborhood disgrace. He wished Mother didn't know there were such people in the world.

"People like that oughta be shut up in an asylum, where they can't do any harm," he said. "They're sorta crazy, anyway."

Mother was sorry Angie was in your room at school—she didn't want you to know about such things, either.

"I guess she was a bad woman, dear. You mustn't think about her. She was bad and selfish, because she didn't love her husband and children enough to stay with them and help them while they were poor and having a hard time."

"But she couldn't have been so very bad, Mother, or she wouldn't have been beautiful, would she?"

"Was she beautiful, dear?" Mother asked with interest.

## 4

As the children grew older, Sally continued her quaint education of them. People, she felt, were the most important things they could learn about. She, herself, took more interest in the narratives of the arithmetic problems they brought home for Peter to help them with than she did in the mathematical value of them.

"Mrs. B has a room twelve feet wide and thirteen feet long. She is going to cover it with carpet two and one-half feet wide. How many yards of carpet will she need?" Sally couldn't help seeing the room in her mind and wondering about the curtains Mrs. B was planning to have at the windows. Would she have to

tack the carpet down herself, and did she know how to use a hammer without pounding her fingers? Would she take care of the carpet, two and one-half feet wide, after she got it down? Did she know that four tablespoons of ammonia put in a pail of clean water makes a fine brightener with which to go over the carpet when it begins to look dingy?

Mrs. B! They had such a mysterious way of designating the characters in these little mathematical dramas! Sally wondered why the arithmetic book didn't state, "Name on request" in the front, as did the endorsements for advertisements of dye and linament.

She knew that the arithmetic and geography and grammar were important; she wanted her children to know all there was to know about these things, but she couldn't help feeling sorry that the schools didn't teach them more about the people who used them in the world.

"New Hampshire is noted for the manufacture of cotton and woolen goods, boots and shoes and machinery, and for the quarrying of stone. The rocky, hilly nature of the land has made farming one of the minor industries of the state," the geography said. Nancy rattled off her information glibly.

But Sally felt there should be some way of telling students whether or not farm women broke their hearts in New Hampshire, because the land was rocky and hilly, and how sturdy lads struggled a while with it and then gave up and went away to manufacture boots and shoes and cotton and woolen goods. Did they work under a stern foreman and live in small, dirty



towns, with only a moving picture show for amusement?

Sally thought they must miss their hills, beautiful in spite of the rocks; they must look at the smoky sky outside factory windows and wonder if it were the same one that used to spread above them while they bumped along, holding down the reluctant plow. How did the people live at the stone quarries? Were the women constantly afraid the explosives would kill their men? If they were ten minutes late, did wives grow panicky? Did the road leading up to their cottage become a thing of apprehension—for fear strange figures walking in step would carry a long form between them? And if the men were hurt or killed, who cared for the women and children?

## 5

What the school neglected to teach, Sally tried to make up for her children. She felt instinctively that this habit of hovering over people with her imagination might be a source of pleasure many people do not know. Peter never seemed the least bit curious about people.

"What d'you care? I got all I can do to think about my own business without wonderin' whether that's his sister or his wife," he would say, if Sally tried to include him in her little imagination game when they were taking their walks in the evening, or riding on the street cars.

But Nancy loved Sally's games.

"Let's play people, Mother," she used to whisper when Sally took her anywhere.

"Playing people" meant selecting some person on the car and being that person with all your imagination. You looked out the window and saw things just as that person was seeing them, with an old lady's eyes, or a workman's, or a man with a violin under his arm. You built up his point of view as fully as you could—his children, his home, what he wanted to do with his money when he'd saved some. Then when you and Mother came home, you traded your "people."

"That woman with the beautiful roses on her hat had a hole in her stocking, Mother," Nancy whispered.

"How do you know?" Sally whispered back.

"My toe is sticking through it," she said seriously. "I can feel it because she just opened her pocketbook, and the lining is pinned with a safety-pin, and her handkerchief isn't clean. She doesn't bother about anything except what shows, does she?" Thus Nancy diagnosed their fellow passenger.

"Who were you, Mother?" she would ask as they came back from their shopping jaunt.

"I was the thin boy in the corner of the street car, with the books under my arm," Sally began. "I looked at the big man with mud on his shoes across the aisle. He's the boss of the crew that puts in the railroad tracks along the river. I wish I could be him. I want to make men admire me, but all the boys I've ever known in my life laugh at me. I've always been sick and sorta weak. I have to study bookkeeping, so I can have an easy job on a high stool in somebody's

office, adding figures all day. I don't like figures much—anybody can add them, and you really never get anywhere after they're added. I want to make something I can see.

"My mother pretends she is glad I'm going to be a bookkeeper. 'It's such clean work, Joe,' she says. I know she'd rather I was a big, dark-faced man, though, who could eat a big plateful of pork chops and spinach at night, and could pick her up in his arms when he kissed her. I stick my hands in my pockets so nobody can see how thin they are. . . . Who were you, Nancy?"

Nancy takes a deep breath; her eyes are very large. She loves telling who she is. She always lets Mother tell her story first, so her own can last longer.

"I'm the actress, buying a pink silk nightgown at the Art Store," she announces triumphantly.

"At first I couldn't decide whether I liked the pink nightie or the darling white one with the lavender flowers sprinkled over it. Then I remembered I could have both of them if I wanted them! I have seventeen others at home, but if they take up too much room in my chiffonier, I can give some of them to my maid, or my butler for his wife—only she is a little fat.

"I hafta hurry home now, because the manicure lady is coming, and the man to show me the samples of silk he's going to line my new automobile with. Maybe if I like a purple silk and a gray one too, I'll have him just line two automobiles for me. If I get tired of them I can send them to my cousin's children to go to school in.

"Last night, when I came home from the theatre, somebody had spread a carpet of rose petals down on my floor for me to walk on. They had heaped up rose petals on my bed like a mattress. I took off all my clothes and dived into them. They made a little tiny rustle and sorta patted my skin all over. I put a black silk lace cover over me and went to sleep, and all night in my dreams I could smell breezes of rose petals."

"Nancy!" Sally exclaimed. Nancy came back from a long way off. There was a glass of milk, and the cold sliced lamb on her plate.

"Well, I could," she said defiantly, and flushed a little.



## *Chapter Eight*

### THE RECRUITING OF PETER

#### 1

By the indirect method known to Methodist ministers, word came to Rev. Dr. Payne from Sally's father that Peter would be a valuable recruit in Sunday school work. Thus it was that Peter found himself trudging every Sunday morning to the little church on Fourth Street, with his Lesson Quarterly tucked under his arm, and impatient pious sentences tucked in his mind.

It vexed him vaguely that he should sacrifice his Sunday mornings for an indifferent cause, simply because he lacked the moral courage to tell Sally's worthy father please to mind his own business. It seemed most unfair that that good gentleman—who found a benign satisfaction in leading his flock—should wield tyranny across the miles.

But it pleased Sally. She felt that Peter had it within him to be a leader of men, and it disturbed her vision of him not at all that his "men" were squirmy, incorrigible little ten-year-olds, who had exhausted less sturdy teachers, one by one.

"You can't measure the good you may be doing, Peter," she often said on Sunday morning, as she poured his fragrant coffee, regarding him with eyes luminous in admiration.



This made it easier for Peter—particularly since Sally was in no danger of seeing the inglorious defeats which he sometimes met in trying to control his obstreperous converts.

Eric and Nancy loved Sunday mornings—Mother in a fresh gingham dress, crackling with starch, and her best crisp underwear, frothing sweetly at the neck when she bent over to fasten their garters; the funny paper, smelling of ink and slightly damp, put out of reach to be awarded to the one who was dressed first. They enjoyed their white canvas shoes, with buttons like cat's eyes, and the smell of the Sunday soap to assail them when they ducked their noses into their chests to sniff. Sunday was all bustle, and properness, and clean starch!

When everyone was ready, they fared forth—Sally faintly swishing in her taffeta dress, her head impiously preening in the ostrich feathers she had dyed blue and fluffed with cornstarch on her little gray hat, Peter very solemn on the outside to make up for his resentment at being sent to church to wrestle with Satan's imps, Nancy proudly swinging her pocketbook, with one bright nickel nestled in its silken depths, and covertly watching her shadow to admire the smart flip of her short skirt as she stepped along. Eric enjoyed Sunday school the most, no doubt. He had that transporting love of drama which would make him participate in a lynching or a revival with equal fervor. Excepting his Sunday school teacher, he enjoyed these weekly excursions into goodness. She was a hard little woman, with small black eyes, that darted like cock-

roaches chasing each other. Her voice was tart, and she pronounced her words grudgingly. Eric felt she should soften her voice and her eyes and "act holy", if she really expected to take the lead in this drama.

"Got your handkerchief, dear?" Sally asked each of her children as she gave hair or necktie a final pat and sent them with a little push of her tightly gloved hand through the Sunday school door. Peter felt as if he were being sent through with the same gesture from Sally's far-away father.

After the regular Sunday school session, the heterogeneous collection of teachers met once a month to discuss their problems with Dr. Payne. This was the part that irritated Peter the most. There were always several old ladies, smelling of lavender, who looked upon the occasion as an opportunity to display their conversational abilities. They would settle themselves placidly in the straight, ugly chairs, fold their black-gloved hands meekly across their stomachs and expound their convictions, nodding their ridiculous hats profoundly and beaming at each other. Peter was the youngest male member of the gathering. He felt he had a bad effect on these old girls, who seemed to show off when he was around.

They made sly little jokes with elaborate coquettishness, and simpered at him whenever he spoke. Miss Adelaide Preston, with whom he could never avoid walking home from these monthly meetings, used to bring him lily-bedecked pamphlets, telling about the advantages of the "pure life." She tapped him affectionately with her tiny Bible, whenever he said any-

thing at all. Miss Adelaide ignored Sally with a sullen aloofness that supplied that mischievous person with a household joke which she always enjoyed.

"Flowers from Friendship's Garden", which Miss Adelaide sent Peter for Christmas, furnished her with tantalizing questions for the rest of her life. "True friends are oft like mirrors, revealing only our beauties," was a quotation from which Sally gleaned delicious amusement.

"Been letting Miss Adelaide primp in the mirror of your friendship, darling?" she would giggle, running to Peter and snuggling her warm, rosy face against his white collar, when he returned from the teachers' meetings. It secretly annoyed Peter to have her joke about the prim little old lady, although he laughed shamefacedly at her teasing. Sally should, he felt, have had more chivalry toward the little person, who found her joy in such platonic experiences.

## 2

One morning Dr. Payne delivered a solemn injunction against the noisy, not-too-clean, children who came from across the railroad tracks. One of them had helped himself from the collection basket, after it had been put in the basement to be counted.

"They are His children, too," Dr. Payne assured the teachers scrupulously, "but we must remember that their lack of opportunities has warped their natures. A grandfather, or an ancestor even more remote, has tainted their characters, and it is almost impossible to

counteract that influence. Bad blood must be reckoned with. No matter how strictly these children may be disciplined, the hideous influence of that vicious ancestor will keep on cropping out and must be met.

"In our own children, we know the little weaknesses, and no matter how mischievous and willful they appear at times, there is no real cause for distress, because we know we can count on their good blood," Dr. Payne declared in his soft, apologetic voice. He had a pink, pointed, face, built on the general scheme of a salmon's snout, and as he talked his thin lips opened wide, as though he were snapping at bait. His collars were always too high and too large, poking his weak chin, when he opened the salmon mouth. Peter scolded Nancy when she said that if he folded up his ears, his head would slide through his collar. But he felt that the youngster had "said a mouthful."

"Of course, we cannot forbid these children coming to our Sunday school. But we must deal with them harshly enough so that they will not feel a freedom to pursue their undesirable habits here," Dr. Payne declared.

Peter didn't listen to the rest of the harangue. Once again he was disturbed by the thought that had troubled him all his life. He felt that he must protect his children from old Joles, and he knew so little about inherited traits that it seemed a menacing blight that might blast their characters at any moment.

Here it was again. On the way home, beside Miss Adelaide Preston, tripping along breathlessly, with her jingle of jet and tremble of feathers, he went over

it miserably. He felt he had not done his duty by Sally, for he had been unable to impress her with the seriousness of their problem.

He had told her about Joles—not in great detail, but fully enough that she might know that his father's character was a stain on the family name. She didn't seem to understand.

"He sounds jolly, dear," she said lightly, when he had told her about Joles before their marriage. "Maybe we'll find him sometime and have him visit us." Sally was like that; so angelic herself that she couldn't realize there were wicked people in the world, with whom one could not mix without being hurt.

That night he resolved to have a serious talk with her. After the children were in bed and Sally was reading recipes in the Sunday paper, yawning like a sleepy little kitten, Peter cleared his throat.

"There's something I got to talk to you about, Sally," he began, not looking at her.

"Yes?" she inquired, without lowering the paper, and stretching her feet before her. "Don't say we can't afford the birthday party for Nancy, after all. I've got it worked out so it won't cost a thing, almost."

"No, this is serious. Remember I told you once, before we were married, that my father wasn't much of a credit to us?" It distressed Peter to say this. His voice was as off-hand as he could make it, but his face was flushed and his eyes were wretched.

"Oh, yes, dear, I remember you said something or other about him. What's it got to do with us?" With quick intuition she tried to help Peter, by making the conversation sound casual.



"We got to watch the children, Sally. I don't know how much you understand inherited characteristics, but we've got to watch Nancy and Eric. Dr. Payne said something this morning that worried me."

"About Nancy and Eric?" Sally's eyes were wide, and her paper collapsed in her lap. No use pretending when Nancy and Eric were the subject.

"Oh, no. He was talking about the kids from across the tracks. He said there isn't much you can do with children who have a bad heritage. He don't know about Nancy and Eric, and me."

Sally was relieved. But she was torn with an agony of pity for her Peter. She had known for years that this imagined danger of weakness of character worried him. Whether or not the worry was ridiculous wasn't the point: he believed it, and she couldn't bear to have him hurt by it.

"Tell me about him, darling," she said, reaching over and taking Peter's hand in her maternal clasp.

"Well, he left without paying his bills." Peter said it very fast. "That's stealing," he added fiercely. "Worse than stealing, because he knew Mother would have to work to pay them. And he—got mixed up with a common woman. He was low, and trashy." These were the words Peter had carried around in his mind for years—queer to hear them hanging in the air for the first time.

"Well"—Sally was at a loss—"perhaps they didn't understand him, Peter. Perhaps he wasn't low and trashy, really. Sometimes people go looking for beauty, and it leads them down strange alleys. Maybe

he couldn't see the common woman as she was; perhaps he thought she was something different," she suggested in her gentle voice.

"No use tryin' to take up for him. He knew she was low, all right, because he had lived with a different kind of woman. Commonness was what he wanted. He wore noisy clothes." Peter admitted it gloomily, as if that settled the matter.

"Well, suppose he did. It's all right for us to realize his weak points, but don't forget that he must have had splendid ones too, or your mother wouldn't have married him. And, Peter, there's only a little of him in Nancy and Eric. There's your big, fine mother to counteract the flashiness of your father, and there's my hopelessly proper old dad, and sweet little mother. And there's you! And me. All of us together will certainly overbalance that naughty old man, won't we?"

"But you've got to realize, Sally, and be strict with them. They mustn't be spoiled and given in to, for their own sakes. We've got to watch everything about them."

He felt a little better. They went to sleep, whispering quaint, delicious plans for the future. College for Nancy, maybe. Sally wanted that passionately. She had a feeling for all lovely things. She knew the atmosphere she wanted her little girl to have—old books that she herself could never find interesting enough to read, and pictures that she herself found drab. She wanted Nancy to know music—real music. She wanted her to care for austere, simple clothes, and

for rooms that were not cluttered with the bric-a-brac Sally could not help loving. She had a feeling for the things she should have liked, and didn't. Nancy must be put right on these things.

She fell asleep while Peter was confiding plans for a washing machine he was working out that might be patented and make them rich. Peter sat up in the moonlight and traced his plans roughly on his pillow with his blunt forefinger.

"A few little points got to be worked out, but the idea's good, and it wouldn't cost much to make it," Peter said in his excited, little-boy voice. Sally murmured with desperately mustered intelligence, struggled a moment with words that somehow didn't make sense on her tongue, gave a little sigh and fell asleep.

Slightly abashed, Peter tucked the blanket about her plump shoulders and slid down into his place.

## 3

"I'd like Nancy to be a school teacher when she grows up," Peter used to say frequently. He was proud of his small daughter, and very stern with her when she got only a moderately good grade in arithmetic.

"I don't like numbers, Mother. They haven't got anything to do with anything you can see," Nancy confided miserably.

"Well, you must do your best, dear. I have to do lots of things I don't like, and so does Daddy and everybody in the world," Sally said. But her heart

wasn't in her discipline. She felt somehow that Nancy should be spared the dull routine of arithmetic.

"She'll never need it when she writes," she said to herself. But of course she couldn't say it aloud. Peter wouldn't have known what she was talking about—nor would Nancy.

"When Nancy goes to Normal School," was Peter's frequent introduction to some plan or other. Sally never objected, but in the back of her neat little head she was determined that if Nancy went to Normal School, it would be only to learn about children, so she could put them in her stories.

"Perhaps a year wouldn't hurt her anyway, and by that time she'll know herself that she must write, and that will make it all straight," she thought in her trusting way.

Sally never for a moment doubted. Why, hadn't she read *Les Misérables*, by Mr. Victor Hugo, before Nancy was born, and studied the dictionary so her baby would have a passion for words? Perhaps she would even write poetry! Sally herself often read Ella Wheeler Wilcox, and Henry van Dyke. She liked the sad poetry best. She used to say the lines over to herself while she dusted, and cry a little over them. It wasn't so much what the words said, as that the sound of them had a melancholy beauty when you whispered them to yourself. The rhymes coming at the ends of the lines were like little, soft gongs sounding.

Peter had no idea of poetry. He used to rattle off verses from James Whitcomb Riley sometimes, in a stentorian voice, but he felt they were rather silly.

Walt Mason in the Sunday paper was more like it. He had something to say a fella could understand—puttin' on your straw hat in the spring, and swattin' flies, and gettin' a grouch—but no foolishness about rosebuds and little birds tweetin' in the trees! Peter liked roses and birds, all right, but there was something silly about talking about them, like kissing in public, and calling Sally "dear" in front of company, the way the Stones did.

"Just think what a lot of pleasure the people who write these stories bring to the world," Sally used to say to Nancy, when she looked through their magazines. "Women tired of workin' and lookin' after fretty babies, all over the country, have a chance to forget themselves in these. Just a little sheet of paper and a drop of ink, and they can go to Paris or Honolulu for fifteen minutes, and can be young and in love with somebody wonderful. Isn't that the most marvelous thing in the world?" Nancy thought it was.

But Sally never put her precious hope into words. Nancy had a little of Peter's independence. She must discover this need for herself, and then fight for it with all her might, if she were to value it.

Sally used to find beautiful words, and give them to Nancy for toys, before the child was old enough to discover them for herself.

"'Wisp' is like a little butterfly with fringes on his wings. When you say it softly, you can almost feel it brushing against your cheek, can't you?" And Nancy could. She used to purse her small lips and close her eyes and repeat the word, and feel it lighting on her



auburn hair, and settling on her fingers.

"Currants and caraway! Don't they make a little tune when you say them?" Sally found them in her recipe book. There were so few places she knew to look for lovely words for Nancy. Some were on her spice boxes—cinnamon, anise, savory, coriander; and in her seed catalogues—kohlrabi, linaria, verbena, clematis; names of cloth—nun's veiling, batiste, velour. They were like jewels to Sally, and she gave them gloriously to her small daughter to play with and stud somehow in the tapestry of her mind that she was unconsciously embroidering.

When Sally found some little papers scribbled with Nancy's bold young hand, describing a garden the child had seen, tears of gratitude sprang to her eyes. Nancy never spoke of the shy scribblings, and Sally pretended she had not seen them. But she yearned passionately to say, "Oh, darling, the larkspurs *are* like blue church steeples!"

She said Nancy's words over and over to herself: "The larkspurs are church spires, and a globe of dew tinkles at the top, like a chime on Sunday morning."



## *Chapter Nine*

### SALLY SEES THE WORLD

#### 1

ONE August morning, when Nancy was twelve and Eric fourteen, a letter came to Sally from Magnold, written on the flimsy, blue-lined tablet paper that Magnold used when she laboriously corresponded, calling on the score of words she knew how to write in English.

"Come to me now. Peter's father is in trouble. Don't tell Peter. I need you."

That was all the letter said, bumpily written in the pale blue ink that Sally remembered had always been behind the clock on Magnold's mantelpiece, freezing in the winter when she closed her parlor, and thawing out, good as new, in the spring.

Sally knew that Magnold's trouble must be serious, else she would not have written. The grotesque note was as inarticulate as Magnold's words would have been had she spoken to Sally.

"Well, I must go, I expect. But I'm sure I don't know how I can without Peter's knowing," Sally said to herself, as she hummed about, cleaning her kid gloves and recurling the feathers on her best hat. If she was to help Magnold, she would need all the courage she possessed. Ostrich feathers and spic-and-span

gloves fanned Sally's courage. She, who never deceived Peter in even the most trivial details, was racking her brain to devise a way to mislead him about this trip she must take *for his sake*.

She was feverish with excitement, when she took a street car to a Western Union office on the other side of the city, from which to send a telegram to her mother, asking that she be called immediately home on some pretext. She avoided the impersonal eyes of the gum-chewing clerk, as he mechanically repeated the words of her message in an indolent voice.

"Send for me to come home to-night by wire, will explain, love Sally, forty-five cents," the clerk intoned, banging a rubber stamp noisily on the sheet, and ringing up the forty-five cents on the cash register before Sally had time to open her pocketbook.

When she returned home, she sorted the children's underwear, laying it in sets—a panty-waist, two pairs of ruffled panties, petticoat, stockings, for Nancy; drawer-body, underdrawers and stockings for Eric. They could automatically go through the piles, one set every other day while she was gone, so Peter wouldn't have the perplexity of thinking about it.

She baked a big cake, and two pies, and a large meat loaf, to be sliced. That ought to last several days, she thought.

While they were eating dinner, the doorbell rang.

"You go, Peter," Sally said, as nonchalantly as possible.

Eric had twisted around in his chair and was gazing through the tiny front hall at the square of glass, hung with the hand-initialed door curtain.

"It's a telegram boy," he announced excitedly. Telegrams in the Lauren neighborhood meant only grave accidents, or rare visits. After the uniformed boy had stopped with his bicycle before any house, all the neighbors sent their children over to see if there was anything they could do to help.

"Now don't get excited," Peter immediately cautioned Sally, who was doing her best to look more excited than guilty—"might not be for us."

But it was. He glanced at Sally's name on the envelope and tore it open shakily. They opened each other's mail with mutual understanding.

The children stood silent with awe, while Peter read it and then cleared his throat.

"Now there's nothing to be worried about, Mother," he began reassuringly. "Your mother seems to want you to come for a little visit."

"Is something wrong?" Sally asked in a small, gulpy voice.

But telegrams are notoriously noncommittal. They say their weird, capital-lettered lines tersely, with absurd typographical errors as to names, and mysterious numbers and letters tucked in the corners.

"Can you come at once stop am lonesome and need you stop wiring money mother," the message read.

"Do you think she's ill?" Sally asked faintly, hoping Peter would be so busy reassuring her that he wouldn't notice her discomfort. Secretly Peter felt Sally's mother must be at the point of death, but he smiled and clapped Sally on the shoulder smartly.

"Course not! She only wants to see you. Probably

jealous of your old hubby and kids for keepin' you to theirselves so long," he laughed jovially. Then he added, twisting his mouth in the way he did when hiding anxiety, "Well, she might be feeling a little tired or something. Woman of her age's apt to have little spells, you know. You'd better go to-morrow mornin'. No need of her wiring the money: guess we can send you on a vacation if we want to."

The children began bubbling with questions.

"We going? How long'll it take? You goina sleep on the train, Mother?"

"Now, if you want to help your mother get ready, you'll be quiet and not get in her way. She's got a lot to do to get ready by to-morrow, and you must be big. We'll finish dinner, and then Nancy can clear the table and show Mother how things are going to go while she's away," Peter blustered, shooing Sally back to her place.

"I'd better go down to the station and see about trains," he continued, beginning to eat nervously.

He did not think of 'phoning. This was much too important to be 'phoned about. He must go down and look at the time-table, and then inquire earnestly at the information desk if the 9:10 was a good train, if it ran on Thursdays, and if Sally must change at Chicago. Peter never took a chance. Printed schedules were like telegrams; they said their say, and that was all you could get out of them.

"Wasn't it lucky I baked to-day?" Sally remarked innocently.

In less than an hour every family on the street was



discussing Sally's journey. Mrs. Kelly came over to offer her new traveling bag that had been used only when her husband went to the Elks' convention and when her sister got married. Mrs. Burgess insisted that she would pack a nice lunch for Sally to take on the train.

"Now, don't you worry about that at all, Mrs. Lauren. I know how it is when you're in a hurry to get started on a trip. I think a person's got more appetite on a train for something someone else fixed. You like mayonnaise on your chopped ham?" she asked.

"Now, I will, too," she shrilled pleasantly, when Sally attempted a polite protest.

Sally flew around, giving explicit instructions to Nancy about the Fulton Friendly Club, whose order was due in a few days, and a jumbled caution of cooking instructions.

"Be sure to watch that gas oven, Lovey. It goes out on you if you don't keep your eye on it. You mustn't get to readin' and forget all about it. It's dangerous, you know. And empty the ice water every morning before you leave for school. You can leave the lunch dishes piled neatly in the sink, and wash them with the supper dishes at night, and Eric'll help you. I know you're going to be Mother's big girl. You'll get along beautiful."

She disappeared for a moment into her closet, and came out with one shoe and her woolen underwear, smelling of moth balls and faintly blue from being packed away. "Don't try to make those fussy desserts, dearie. They take too much time, and Daddy's just

as pleased with some nice sliced bananas or something like that."

Lights burned in the Lauren house until midnight. Even after Sally had gone to bed, her preparations neatly indexed in her mind, she had to get up and run downstairs to make a little card of warnings and reminders for Nancy's housekeeping.

It was pinned on the wall, under the insurance calendar on which Sally kept her bookkeeping accounts. Nancy found it years later, where she had tucked it in an old notebook. It had a drop of clove oil on one corner that brought back an unsuccessful attempt to bake some spiced pears for Daddy.

## 2

In the day coach, with her coat folded and laid like a sleeping child in the rack above, and her bags packed demurely around her, Sally lost her identity, as one does in strange places and among strange people. Five minutes after the train had started, Peter—dear, fussy, plump Peter—and the children, so adorably eager to make Mother understand they intended to be "big", seemed as far away as though she had dreamed them.

She was herself, hung in space for a few brief hours, with no connection to anyone else. A few other individuals lived with her in this narrow, racing world that flowed through the land like a swift channel, leaving houses and trees and bill-boarded hills retreating behind it. Her sense of futility was infinitely restful. There was nothing to do in this narrow world of

thirty-six hours, bounded on each side by green cushions and panoramic windows. No use worrying, or even planning. She hummed a song she had forgotten for seventeen years, and pulled her soft hair out in little puffs above her ears.

A magazine-boy came through the car, his wares arranged precariously on one long arm. He mouthed a mealy mumble of enticing names. Sally took a bright quarter from her pocketbook and held it in the palm of her hand.

"I want a magazine—some light reading, please—just stories, no receipts or household hints," she said in her twinkling little voice.

She was almost voluptuous in luxury. Magazines for Sally were selected with scrupulous care and foresight, clipped and pasted and saved in scrapbooks, so that investment in them brought multiple interest. Here she was tossing a quarter recklessly over her shoulder, and not expecting to pick up thirty cents' worth of return for it!

## 3

At a station near Philadelphia, a plump, red-haired woman and her small daughter boarded the train, followed by a tan-faced, lean young man, bumping his suitcase against the seats and perspiring copiously.

"Sit here, Daddy. Whew, it's nice to get settled! There, darling, take your dolly," the red-haired woman said, all out of breath. Sally loved nice, clean, happy people like this. Her mind immediately began playing over them.

The woman had beautiful white skin, that crinkled delightfully at the back of her neck like a baby's. Her hair was done elaborately, and her dress was slightly flashy, Sally said to herself, but there was a tangy perfume about her, like purple petunias after an early morning rain. Her husband, it was evident, adored her. He was tall and homely, and painfully neat—a druggist, or a draftsman, or a bookkeeper with great ambitions.

On and on, the sky line bobbed up and down, up and down. An endless tune, was the line of it. Sally tried to follow it with her humming—dipping suddenly when there was a green-bannered valley with a thread of silver stream sewn across the bottom, and rollicking on the high notes where a white fence balanced along the top of a cliff, and then hurried down.

Sally peeled an orange. The pungent smell of it was faintly depressing in the warm railroad car. Her mind went back to caressing the red-haired woman and her devoted husband. They were leaning their heads together and whispering, laughing idly. Solemn-eyed, their child clasped her doll and gazed absorbedly from the window, in the seat facing theirs.

The red-haired woman would have crisp, lavender dresses of percale, with pockets and trimmings made of flowered cretonne. A pair of satin slippers left from her trousseau, and run down at the heels, she wore for bedroom slippers. She slept with her knees drawn up—a soft, petunia-scented ball—with a nightgown warm and soft, and torn a little at the neck. Her hair curled like a goldfish's tail across her shoulder as she slept.

Her bronzed, hard husband wakened her in the morning and threatened to roll her out of bed. She murmured, whimpered and yawned and curled herself more tightly. She was a poor cook, but an accurate housekeeper. She cried easily and had a temper that melted suddenly when her husband gruffly rolled her plump little person in his arms. All women to him were interpreted in terms of this sweet, bigoted little red-head. When the word knee is mentioned, he immediately sees an ivory, dimpled, knee, with an adorable brown mole on its curve, because hers is fashioned so. Backs to him are plump—soft little backs that melt to an embrace, and the only hair he ever thinks about is soft, atrociously dressed, red-gold hair that breaks into little curls at a white neck. Gold hairpins are always sliding down her back in a sudden twinkle, like a tear.

## 4

It was through little Dorothea that Sally became acquainted with the red-haired woman and her husband. Sally made the little girl a hammock with two sleeping babies in it, from her handkerchief, and listened to the child's rambling stories of mythical adventures. At luncheon time she gave her small friend ham-and-mayonnaise sandwiches and the soggy little pink frosted cakes that Mrs. Burgess had packed for her. By tea time, however, the four of them spread their combined luncheon together on a turned up suit case, and had a jolly, laughing time.



"This is the first time we've traveled together, ain't it, Jim, since we went out to Atlantic City on our honeymoon?" the red-haired woman said, eating her sandwich in big mouthfuls, and spilling crumbs on the lace front of her gown. Her name was Madeleine, pronounced to rhyme with vine.

"Nice honeymoon it was," Jim replied, "with you catchin' the measles the second day, and bein' cross as a bear from then on."

"From then on. I like that. You sound like I was still cross," she giggled, flicking the crumbs from her ruffles and looking at her husband coquettishly. Purple petunias in the rain! Sally enjoyed herself.

"We're visiting Madeleine's mother. Kid ain't seen her for ten years," Jim explained.

"Go on, now, tell everybody what an old woman I am! You ain't supposed to speak of ten years like it was nothin' when you're talkin' about your wife's past," Madeleine rallied, her pansy-brown eyelashes fanning up and down. She was too young to care, but jokes about age were conventionally proper between husband and wife.

"Are you surprising her, or does she expect you? I never can decide which is most fun—letting people plan for you, or surprising 'em," Sally said.

"She knows we're coming sometime or other, but she don't know we've started yet," Jim explained.

"Jim's goin' in business with Ma," Madeleine said proudly. "Ma's got a fine chance for him, and Jim didn't have a good chance to get along where he was. Jim's a great salesman, but of course it's better if we

can have a business of our own, so we're movin' to Millhaven—oh, what a dump!" Madeleine made a little face and shook her extravagant head disgustedly.

## 5

Sally reached Des Moines just at dusk. Madeleine and Jim, and even little Dorothea, helped her gather her bags together, and parted with her as though they'd been old friends. Sally realized with a guilty start that she had forgotten to worry about what had brought her away from home.

"Why, I've been taking a sort of vacation, and not even thinking about Peter's father. Well, I guess there wasn't much I could do until I knew what was the matter, anyway," she said to herself, as she waited for the rapidly marching lights of the station to halt in their parade outside the window.

She had a letter to post to Peter and the children, saying that she had reached Des Moines safely, and reminding them to dig up the dahlia bulbs and store them away in the cellar as soon as the flowers drooped. Mother would be thinking of them every minute, and would hurry home as soon as she could. Much love, dears.

Mrs. Graves was waiting for Sally in the gloomy station, her eyes as bright as ever and her mouth wearing its good-humored, slightly quizzical, smile that people felt hinted at a part of the minister's wife which they never saw.

"What's it all about, Child?" she said as soon as she

had kissed Sally—and looking at her keenly. “Not quarreling, or anything silly like that, are you?”

“Mercy, no, Mother, anything but! But Mrs. Lauren has sent for me for some trouble she doesn’t want Peter to know about, and this was the only way I could think of to deceive him,” Sally explained on their way over to the dilapidated Ford that Mrs. Graves drove.

“Well, thank Heaven! I haven’t told your father you were coming. He’d never have stood the suspense of not knowing the reason—worse than women about being inquisitive, men are, but they never admit it,” Mrs. Graves continued, opening the Ford door.

“If you don’t mind, Mother, I think I’d better go straight over to Mother Lauren’s,” Sally said timidly, as soon as she had inquired about everyone, and had given an account of her own family.

“That’s where I’m taking you, dear. I’ll leave you there, and if you want to come home to-night, you can call us up. Probably it will be better to wait until tomorrow if Mrs. Lauren has sent for you,” the older woman said.



## *Chapter Ten*

### LIFE SIZE

#### I

SALLY found Magnold getting her lonely meal, padding quietly around the kitchen, followed by her morose gray tomcat. There was the same air of chagrined austerity about Magnold's kitchen with which Sally always associated it in her mind. The surfaces of the pans were pools of reflected light. The rag rugs were faded, as though apologizing for their color. A frugal meal of cold beef and currant buns and whole, scarlet tomatoes, from Magnold's vines, was spread on the table. Magnold never sliced her tomatoes, but ate them like apples, from her large brown hands.

Magnold herself was not much changed by the years. Her movements were less steady, and her fine old eyes had dimmed with the fading of the rag rugs, but her indomitable tilt of chin was still there, and the old, baffling mystery of her silence.

"I'm glad you came, Sally. Joles is in trouble. It is jail, I think, unless there is a smart lawyer for him. Benny and Louis don't know—I didn't want to tell them," she said simply.

Her news had come in a letter from Joles, the first he had sent his wife since the Sunday morning when

he had gone on his jaunty way. Magnold held it in her hand as she talked—sheets closely written in Norwegian, with flourishes and curlycues and shaded dashes. Sally wished Magnold could translate that letter, so she might know something of this Joles who had made such a difference in her Peter's character by the very fact that he didn't want it to make *any* difference.

But Magnold made no attempt to translate. She read passages to herself occasionally, her thin lips trembling with excitement, and remarkable color mounting suddenly to her cheekbones. She spoke awkwardly, meeting Sally's sympathetic gaze with difficulty. It was poignantly evident that this stark woman still responded in some mysterious way to the careless demand of the man she had loved. And Joles, back and forth across the world, from one indulgent woman to another, must have remembered his power over the big inscrutable creature, whose strength was so dominant.

Joles was the manager of a small moving picture and vaudeville theatre in Millhaven, a little town in Kansas. His position made him exceedingly happy, and his ambition was to own the theatre. He had tried to save enough to make the owner an offer, but it was almost impossible to get started, he said.

"He don't know nothin' about money," Magnold interpolated.

At last he interested some woman in lending him enough money to start, and now the woman had had him thrown into jail because she believed he deceived



her about the deal. Magnold was vague about the transaction, but certain that Joles had meant no harm.

"He says she wasn't usin' the money, anyway, and he'd give it back to her sometime," Magnold explained, in shamefaced defense.

Magnold felt herself too unsophisticated in the mysteries of law to go to help Joles, but she was confident that Sally could find someone who would quickly free the incorrigible old man, and restore peace to the outraged owner of the idle funds. Magnold had the faith of the simple in the power of all things she could not understand.

"Mother Lauren, is he still living with that woman?" Sally asked reluctantly.

Magnold looked proudly at her daughter-in-law, a trace of the old fire in her gaze.

"What does that matter? Joles has been careless in his life, but not wicked. Suppose he has found a woman to please him—I hope he has. He has so much happiness in him, it should come out. If this woman can get it out of him, so much the better," she said fiercely.

"But what about you?" Sally asked.

"What about me? I should be the same if he was here moping around. I can not make him glad he is living. I don't know how it is some women do that." Then, with a proud flash of her old eyes, "But when he is in trouble, he knows that I can find him help."

Magnold was eager for news of Peter and the children—principally Peter, though. She cradled her hands unconsciously against her old breast while she

listened about him, and Sally felt she was seeing the old woman more nearly stripped of her reserve than ever before.

"Tell me, do you make secrets for him?" she asked.

"Secrets? Oh, no, we never keep anything from each other, Mother Lauren," Sally assured her.

"That ain't what I mean. Men like not to know all there is to know about women; they want surprises. I don't know what it is—I never had that in me. It's like a house, sorta. They want some of the doors locked in the rooms. They want to peep through the keyhole and think they see pretty things inside. Sometimes they want you to unlock the door and show them a new room yourself. They love that. You know what I mean? I couldn't do that. I opened all my doors and invited him into all the rooms at once. Men get tired of that. I don't know exactly. . . ."

Magnold ended feebly.

"Oh, Mother Lauren, don't you want to know the people you love? I don't want mysteries in the people I love. Do you?"

"Naw. We're women. Yust women are like that." Magnold shook her head mournfully. She got up and opened the door of her fat, black stove to shove two sticks within; then creaked back to the low seat she loved, squatting carefully, her knees far apart, her clasped hands hanging between them.

"Naw, Sally—if you ain't got any rooms he hasn't seen, better get some. Have a lot of crazy notions he don't understand. Make yourself pretty nightdresses, even if he don't have no dessert for dinner. Keep

your hair curly and wear flowers on your hat. You'd like better to spend money for roasts for Sunday, or something for him, but you mustn't. He'll get tired. I don't know how it is, but there are lots of little tricks to keep men crazy for you. I see them in the stores when I go down town. Smart people make 'em. You be sure, they know their business. Women gotta have 'em for their men." Magnold looked wise; then she laughed a little, almost bitterly, except that her old eyes were as tender as tears.

"You know me? I saved money so Joles could buy hisself fine clothes. He liked pretty suits. I wore black, ugly dresses. Well, that was yust the only kind I know how to wear. He got tired of dressin' hisself up after a while. Plenty common women waitin' to be dressed up."

Sally knew that Magnold wanted her to say nothing.

She slept in Peter's old room, between sheets smelling faintly of frangipani. There was an old cap of the little boy Peter on the shelf of the closet, and a school book, spotlessly clean, but with a pencil caricature marked, "Pa beating Ben", in the inside cover. Sally cried a little after she turned out the kerosene lamp and let the moonlight stencil her floor in squares from the little paned window. She wondered if Magnold might ever have cried—that stern, proud old Magnold.

In the morning Magnold gave her two hundred dollars in new twenty-dollar bills, and a thin letter to Joles. Sally felt that probably it was a scolding letter.



## *Chapter Eleven*

### WHILE THE MOUSE IS AWAY

#### 1

PETER felt that The House had become a sort of stage upon which everyone in the neighborhood leveled opera glasses. There seemed to be a conspiracy among the neighbors to try never to leave the little home unvisited at any time during the day. It was as if they hoped their uproar would divert the attention of the remnant family from Sally's absence. If Mrs. Kelly wasn't screaming with glee at her own jokes, Mrs. Burgess was cautioning the children against doing whatever they happened to be doing.

"Don't be handling that old can, Eric. My uncle had a hired man who got a little, weeny cut you could hardly see on his finger from a tomato can. And in seven hours, mind you, his arm and his leg and half his face were as black as that kettle with blood poisoning," she would say—and then, dramatically, "They had to amputate."

"Half of his face?" from Eric, full of glee.

Peter suffered the supreme outrage when Mrs. Drake took his personal darning and mending to the Fulton Friendly meeting, and passed around the undershirts and stockings and drawers to the members for fond ministrations. Peter never went out on the

street, after that, without dread of meeting some of these strange females who had come in such intimate contact with his underwear. He always imagined they had a knowing twinkle in their eyes when he lifted his hat to them on the street, as though they were thinking: "I bet he's got on that undershirt with the darn I put on the left shoulder. Now, you know nobody could get a hole on his left shoulder, unless he was scratching his back with a comb. Imagine!"

He didn't admit it to himself, but he felt remotely injured that Sally should consent to leaving him, when she knew he was at the mercy of the children and the neighbors. He took pains to write her cheerful letters, urging her to stay as long as she wanted, or as long as her mother needed her, and assuring her they were getting along splendidly.

"You might as well stay until Thanksgiving, if you want to, dear. It is good experience for Nancy to be managing a house, and we are all getting along like clockwork. When you come back, I doubt if you will find anything to do. Your son and daughter have taken things over so completely, you can be company from now on," he wrote valiantly.

The clockwork was not literally true, but he didn't want Sally to spoil her visit by worrying about things at home. "A woman ought to have a vacation alone at least once in five years," he told the men at the Yard stoutly. "Keeps her broad-minded and interested in the rest of the world. Besides, it's good for her family to know what it's like, trying to get along without her."



## 2

Nancy felt important these days. Daddy was so gallant and sweet to her now that Mother was away and didn't have to be fussed over all the time. Daddy made you feel quite a big lady. He said pretty things about your hands, after you gave yourself a nice manicure.

"Where'd you get the shiny finger nails?" he asked, noticing them immediately when you poured the coffee at the table. Mother always poured the coffee in the kitchen, because there was only a blue granite coffee-pot to pour it from, but Nancy felt that if one were really charming about it, one's personal grace made up for the kitchen pot.

"You like them?" she smiled, looking at her father coyly, as she handed him the coffee. Some of it was spilled in the saucer, but he was polite about not noticing.

"Shined 'em with a old piece of chalk," Eric volunteered. "Fool way to waste good chalk."

"They're very nice," Daddy said, ignoring Eric. "I wouldn't have the ends too pointed, though. Really beautiful finger nails should look like they could do things. A real woman knows that she ain't entitled to beautiful finger nails until she's learned how to make a pie. You made yours yesterday, so you got a right to begin thinking about dressing up your hands."

Nancy's meals were a terrible gamble. She was lured down bypaths of culinary art that led to disappointing, soggy puddings, and odd conglomerations of

salads. Mother's cookbook was plentifully illustrated with highly colored prints of pink and white pudding, flaunting little kinky bows of whipped cream. Salads in Mother's book were crisp creations of scooped-out tomatoes with a lettuce plume curling jauntily, and cool slim shafts of cucumber decorating the plate.

They seemed simple in the pictures, but when Nancy tried to materialize the colorful food, it always flopped. The puddings were invariably too soft or too hard, and their colors—pink and white, and green of mint—ran together and made a discouraged gray mass, with shamefaced pools of liquid whipped cream floating on top.

But she always started out courageously with the vision of some delectable surprise in her mind. Perhaps, this time, Daddy would be proud. . . . Well, she'd try again to-morrow!

Daddy was amazingly considerate about it. He laughed a little when a new dish first appeared—of course it was funny—and then he appeared tremendously surprised that it tasted so good.

"What's this?" he'd always exclaim noisily, when Nancy, wearing Mother's apron, with her auburn hair pinned high on the top of her small head, swept in breathlessly with her latest creation. "Eric's bicycle tire, or I'll eat my hat! And all dressed up with holly!"

"Now, Daddy, that's Vienna meat ring, and you know very well that's parsley. Mother often uses it," Nancy would say sternly, setting the dry, rubbery looking ring of meat before Peter. The parsley cov-

ered the places where it had scorched in the pan, but Nancy felt it looked rather decorative.

After dinner was really the best time for everyone. Daddy sat on the back porch with his paper, reading out bits of news, just as he did to Mother, while they washed the dishes. Nancy displayed a great interest in this news. Mother, she had always felt, was a trifle absent-minded about it.

"Is that so, dear?" Mother usually remarked placidly, and then, with much more interest, "Here, Nancy, one at a time for those saucers. You never wipe them thoroughly dry when you do two together."

"I see Congress is going to extend that C Street near Church. Take in all those nigger shanties," Peter called in through the screen door to Nancy.

"Well, isn't that splendid?" Nancy would respond, as though she had been hoping for years that Congress would see its way clear to improving the section.

"The Governor's called out the militia to put down that miners' strike in Pennsylvania," Daddy would volunteer, just as though Nancy knew all about it.

"Well, it's about time they did something," she would say, in a sprightly voice.

"Lot you know about the militia!" derisively, from Eric. Nancy knew how to wilt him with a look.

After the dishes were done, the three of them settled down to an evening's entertainment. Nancy and Eric did their "home work" in the afternoon, so that they'd be quite free to play with Daddy. It was a sort of responsibility to keep him entertained, so that he wouldn't be lonesome without Mother.



## *Chapter Twelve*

### SALLY GOES TO JAIL

#### 1

AT Millhaven, Sally went directly to the jail, a red brick building in what had once been the business part of the town. A hospital stood across the street. Children living in the run-down houses nearby were continually on the alert for the patrol wagon and the ambulance, which clanged through the streets with raucous clatter. Eyes were avid in this street, and calamity was plentiful. Sally hurried through it, determining that none of it should register on her mind.

"I will not see it . . . that child, poking under his dress," she said to herself.

Inside the office of the jail, two defiant women were waiting—one in a gold lace hat and soiled white gloves. The other had been crying, but the marks were smeared over with powder, and her cheeks blazed with applied color. They glared at each other haughtily. But when Sally left, they were talking furtively in hoarse whispers. Disgraceful sorrow is like that.

A kindly-faced officer was making figures on a large report sheet, tracing along rows of figures with a grimy finger, and mumbling calculations through his gray moustache.

"I want to see Joles Lauren, if you please," Sally

said timidly. "I'm his daughter," she added apologetically.

"His daughter? Well, just a minute and we'll see what we can do about it," the old officer said, looking at her sharply over his gold rimmed spectacles. He 'phoned to some mysterious region, looking at Sally quizzically, and suddenly beginning to smile at her as he waited for a reply.

"Nice out to-day, ain't it? Seen the fire up the street? 'Bout out now, I guess. Yep. All rightie, boy."

"Jes' minute. Somebody'll be right down to take you in," he said to Sally jovially.

Beyond the outside office, the jail-yard lay, pathed with narrow concrete walks, and surrounded by walls perforated with eyeless windows. Naked wooden staircases, hideous and somehow sinister, crawled along the walls, stopping briefly at flat doors. Across the yard, Sally followed the glum-looking guard, who escorted her in silence, and entered a heavy door, which opened into a sort of amphitheatre, surrounded by iron grating like chicken wire. A huge, throne-like desk was in the midst of this, and hard, wooden benches faced it. Daylight came in pitilessly through the ranks of bare windows. Thank God, Peter would not see this!

Unlocking one of the iron doors, the guard led her down a narrow aisle of cells, unmercifully exposed. Even the lavatories, spaced here and there between the cells, had no doors—only walls of iron wire. An angry-faced youth in a new straw hat was slumped against



his wall, rolling his bloodshot eyes and cursing in feeble rage.

"Got no damn right. 'Fmy old man knew, he'd blow the gottdam place to hell." Sally lowered her eyes and hurried along.

The guard had stopped. Sally looked up. There were Peter's eyes—bright blue and audacious, yet baffled somehow. He stared at her resentfully.

"Your daughter, 902," the man announced.

Why, he was a white-haired boy! His face was soft and untanned; his weak mouth was good-natured and trusting; he toyed nervously at his bright necktie with finely manicured white hands.

"Yeh? Hello, there," he said, smiling broadly, coming over to Sally and extending his hand graciously.

"I've—I've come to help you. I'm Peter's wife," Sally said nervously.

"Peter's wife. So Peter has a woman!" The idea seemed to please him. His blue eyes twinkled, and he nodded his heavy white head thoughtfully.

"Well, well! I thought he was still a boy. Ain't that funny? I was thinking about him yesterday—yust yesterday."

The gloomy guard brought Sally a wooden chair and placed it beside Joles' cell.

"What you goin' do? What Magnold say about me?" Joles asked sheepishly, but with impudent amusement.

"She wants to help you. We all want to help you. You must tell me all about it, and we will see about getting a good lawyer for you."

"Yeh, that's what I need—a damn good lawyer. Yust a little sense, and he could see how it is," Joles assured her.

He told her everything as a little boy would pour it out—his justification first, and then hastily he admitted the facts.

"That Annie, damn gutter-rat, too scared to come around here. Makin' like she don't know nothin' about me. I'll fix her. She'll never get another red cent as long as I'm livin'. I been good to Annie for long time, and now when I get in a little trouble, she beats it off like a scared rat. She ain't no good, anyway," he said forlornly.

"Are you living with Annie?" Sally asked delicately.

"Well, off'n on. Yeh, I live with her mostly, but she's got such a damn temper I have to get out every once in a while. I've got her spoiled, making her think she's something all this time. That's what's the matter with her." The matter with Annie seemed to interest Joles more than his present difficulties. His blue eyes brooded angrily as he thought about her.

Sally stayed more than an hour and learned the real facts with difficulty. Joles was a seething outburst of resentment, mixed with delight at his own prankishness. He seemed to consider his behavior as mischievous, rather than malicious, and it evidently had not occurred to him that it might have unpleasant consequences.

"You shoulda seen me in my uniform," he said brightly, when Sally inquired about the theatre. "You wouldn'ta knowed the old man! Had gold braid on

the sleeves, and draped across the front, and a gold eagle on the cap—mighty swell looking, I tell you.

“Well, I thought it’d be a good thing for me to buy the theatre. I might’s well as not owned it, anyway, ’cause old Ginsberg never showed up—yust only once in a coupla weeks, anyway. I done all the work, and I usta say to myself, I might’s well be takin’ in the money, too.

“Well, I started savin’, but every time I got a hundred dollars ahead, that damn Annie would find out about it, and then we’d go on a spree or something. I saw that wa’n’t goin’ to get us anywhere. So Mrs. Kramer—old lady I usta board with sometimes—had \$4300 she wa’n’t usin’. She wanted to buy some kinda business with it, so she could have her good-for-nothin’ son-in-law move out here. I told her I’d take her money and yust put it with mine, and we’d buy the movie between us. She didn’t know much about business, anyway, and I figured it was worth half-interest for her to have a good man to look after things for her.

“Well, anyway, she give it to me. Then old Ginsberg and me got to arguin’ back and forth about if or not he wanted to sell it. Well, anyway, he took so long decidin’ that I’d used some of the old lady’s money for livin’ on and gettin’ some things we needed, and like o’ that. You know, a owner of a theatre has to live in a kinda swell place, and look kinda classy, or people get to thinkin’ the theatre’s a cheap place; you see?

“’Course I was goin’ to give it all back to Mrs.

Kramer, but she got excited and didn't give me time. Now she says she don't think I ever meant to buy the theatre for her. Ain't that yust like a woman? Yust because I ain't had time to put the business through yet! Well, she don't understand business."

Frightened and sick with disgust that these eyes of Peter's should live in such an old reprobate's head, Sally took Annie's address and left, promising to come to see Joles again.

## 2

Annie was out when Sally called, but the suspicious occupant of the flat across the hall opened her door two inches and volunteered information.

"Miss MacClair's at the movies. She'll be back about five," she said, unsuccessfully attempting to brush back shaggy gray hair from her eyes.

Sally sat on the bottom of the creaking, dirty stairs leading to Annie's apartment. At quarter to five Annie came in, limping a little on tottering French heels and smelling of cigarette smoke and cheap perfume. At Sally's explanation she seemed resentful, but also curious.

"Come on up, and we'll talk it over. No use letting these damn neighbors know your business. Their ears're always flapping around the keyhole."

Annie's room smelled damp and musty, and yet was too warm. There was a taint of gin in the air. A knowing kewpie, in a purple satin skirt that revealed its dimpled stomach, stood on the upright piano,

which was littered with gaudy, popular music. The matting on the floor was stained and faded. But Annie's furniture was indulgently comfortable, and yellow satin cushions were in abundance.

"Sit down, and take a load off y'r feet," Annie said pleasantly. "If we're goin' to have a session, it might's well be comfortable. Y' have a little drink?" she inquired solicitously.

"No, thank you. I must talk to you and then get back," Sally said hastily. "How long have you and Mr. Lauren been together?" she began.

"Well, Joles is a good-natured slob, but he ain't got a grain o' sense," Annie began, as though she had not heard the question. Sally found it useless to try to guide her story into logical channels. She poured out what she had to say in formless torrents, rocking back and forth on her thin haunches, and chewing uncomfortably at her ragged lips with the set of perfect teeth she wore. Half way through the narrative she removed the teeth with no apologies or self-consciousness.

She was nearly fifty, with hair the color of her old matting. Her skin was brittle and dry and flaked with white powder. She wore one excellent diamond, and several less authentic stones, on her knobby fingers. She was thin and tall, with shambling, splayed hips, and a pendant bosom. Her false teeth gave her face a skull-like appearance, which instantly collapsed when she removed them.

"Joles was an awful fool to take that old woman's money, cause he knew as well as anybody that she was



crazy about money—just worshipped it! I swear I didn't know he had taken it until they arrested him. 'Bout three months ago he showed it to me, and told me a man paid him back a debt out in Arkansas. I thought it looked kinda fishy, but then, Joles's always been lending guys money ever since I knowed him, and I thought maybe somebody come across for a change. We been livin' pretty good since then," Annie said regretfully, regarding the over-stuffed furniture with fond eyes.

"This old woman usta be Joles' landlady when he wasn't livin' with me. She was kinda crazy about him—the old fool. It kinda worried Joles to think of that money standin' idle in a bank, when he coulda used it so handy. Well, you know how you get to thinkin' about somethin' like that. I hafta laugh when I think how that old hag looked when she come over here with the cop. If she hadn't brought the cop, Joles coulda talked her out of it. He's got a terrible way with him, Joles has." She gave the devil his due, almost boastfully.

"'Course I'm keeping outa the way, cause it's none o' my business," Annie said over and over. "I didn't know nothin' about it, and I don't yet. I kinda hate to see Joles go to jail, cause he's been a good frien' to me. But I c'n take care of myself, and don't you forget it!"

Sally was so nauseated by the details of this sordid story that she felt numb. It was like a hysterical nightmare to have to write a sweet, wifely letter to Peter, to be sent to her mother and mailed from Des Moines.

But she thanked her stars, over and over, that she could protect Peter from this ugliness. He couldn't have stood it, feeling as he did about his father.

## 3

The lawyer she went to see was most reassuring. He was tall and thin, with a conspicuous, round stomach. He rubbed his white hands together and laughed mellowly at his own pleasantries; and every once in a while he emphasized what he had to say by reaching over and stroking Sally's knee affectionately. They went over the case together, and he seemed delighted with each new detail.

"Now, don't you worry, little woman. We'll have him out of there before you know it," he said in his melodious voice.

"How can you say that before you've talked to Mr. Lauren and know more about the case?" asked Sally coldly.

"Well, well, what do you think lawyers are for, my dear? It makes little material difference what the case is, so long as we can prove that Mr. Lauren didn't take the money." He leaned back in his chair triumphantly, protruding his round stomach unpleasantly, and regarding Sally with amusement.

"Why, he *says* he took it. He doesn't deny that," Sally gasped.

"Well, his attorney will settle all that, my dear," he assured her blandly. He ushered her out of the office, with his thin hand playing experimentally along the

length of her arm. "You just leave everything to me, and see what a nice surprise you'll have when the case is called."

## 4

When she returned to her hotel, there was a letter forwarded by her mother, from Mrs. Kelly.

"I feel it my duty as one Fulton Friend to another to tell you that you had better hurry home as fast as you can," she wrote. "Mrs. Swan is spending a great deal of time at your house in the evenings, when Mr. Lauren is home, singing and carrying on. Of course, Mr. Lauren is a good, sensible man and knows his own business, I am sure, but you know, Mrs. Lauren, men are only men, and Mrs. S. has had a great deal of experience, I am told.

"Please do not be offended that I have told you this, Mrs. Lauren. I know it is none of my business, but Fultonism means too much to me to stand by and see a lovely home like yours broke up," Mrs. Kelly concluded.

She sounded as though everything were over except the filing of the divorce suit. Sally read the words over and over, the stiff, formal little words, so unlike Mrs. Kelly's exuberant way of talking. They might be only silly gossip, of course, and then again they might hint a real situation. Sally laughed aloud. Her Peter! Funny, awkward, self-conscious Peter, with his conscience. It was like a silly dream.

Yet it is just such preposterous situations about which

people will talk until they become less preposterous and finally true.

Sally was too tired to worry as much as she might have otherwise. It probably was all nonsense. But she remembered Magnold's pathetic warning uneasily. Mrs. Swan, with her complexion creams and her fragrant shampoos, and the slender orange sticks to make pink, idle nails more lovely—these were the secrets Magnold meant—the hundred little artifices that Sally put behind her for Peter's sake. It was all foolishness, probably, but just for good measure, she cried herself to sleep.

## 5

The next day she decided to call on Mrs. Kramer. It was just before dinner time when she reached the Kramer boarding house, not very definite as to her approach, but hoping that the older woman would present her own solution.

The house was one of a gloomy row, built identically in a day when ornate decoration was an achievement. Room-and-board signs hung in many of the windows along that street, and empty rocking chairs sat outside the doors, waiting for the dreary boarders to appear and rock away the evening.

As Sally approached No. 24, she heard a hollow dinner gong sounding querulously in the house. A bad time to be arriving, she knew, but she felt she must interview Mrs. Kramer as soon as possible.

At her ring, a lanky youth opened the door.

"Is Mrs. Kramer in?" Sally began timidly.

"Th' room's rented," he replied laconically, beginning to close the door.

"But I want to see Mrs. Kramer about something else."

"Step in. My mistake." He ushered her indolently into the musty parlor, which was evidently the stamping ground for the boarders and whatever connections they had with the rest of the world. Brass was much in evidence, forming fluted legs to little marble tables, brass lace-work on the picture frames and clocks, and a brass angel, unusually coy and modest with her draperies. Sally waited for ten minutes, while a drab procession of hungry boarders trooped past the door, staring in at her curiously, then turning their heads hastily as though they hadn't seen her. At last Mrs. Kramer came in—a clean, stout, grandmotherly woman, with steel-rimmed glasses set far down on her pudgy nose, and wispy gray hair that curled shyly above her forehead.

"Mrs. Kramer, please try to understand how I feel about comin' to see you," Sally began nervously, half rising and then sinking again in the stiff red plush chair.

Mrs. Kramer's gentle face immediately hardened, assuming suspicious lines, which Sally felt must have grown from long and disillusioning experience as a landlady.

"Well, what is it?" she asked tartly. "I ain't got much time. It's our supper time, you know."

"I'm Mrs. Lauren. I wondered if there wasn't



something we could do about my father-in-law. I've come from Washington to see you."

"It's entirely out of my hands. My lawyer will see you, I'm sure." Mrs. Kramer recited her protective formula blandly. "Your father-in-law deceived me, and tricked my money away from me." At the mere utterance of the words Mrs. Kramer was overcome with grief. Gentle tears began rolling from her mild eyes.

"I should think you'd be ashamed to face me, and see how hard I have to work, and have worked all these years, to get some money, and then to lose it by an old lying rascal like he is. And him spending it to support a shameless old hussy, like they say he does, too." She fought vainly for control, but the tears welled into her throat and choked her speech. Sally was wordless with despair and sympathy. There seemed nothing to do."

"I know, I know . . . it's too dreadful!" she said in her little comforting voice, stroking the soft shoulder of Mrs. Kramer soothingly. "But puttin' him in jail won't help you get the money back; and if he don't go to jail, there might be some way of his earning it back for you. He has no property that could be given to you in exchange, but he might be able to work it out if he can stay out of jail long enough. Perhaps. . . ."

Suddenly Sally was aware of the faint odor of petunias in rain. Down the stairs came Madeleine, a little frown between her sleek brows.

"Don't come in, dearie," Mrs. Kramer called quickly in her wavery voice.

But Madeleine came straight over to Sally. She grasped the circumstances instantly.

"Do you mean to tell me that you're part of that low, sneaking gang of crooks? You oughta be ashamed of yourself—a nice married woman like you pretended to be!" she cried vehemently, her ridiculous pyramid of hair quivering and tottering with rage.

"But . . . it's not my fault. I'm only tryin' to help some way," Sally began defensively, knowing that it would be impossible to quiet these two women, so indignant in their outrage.

"Tellin' me about your sweet little family, and knowin' all the time that they were crooks. You oughta be arrested and thrown in with your father," Madeleine screamed. "That is the nice, sweet little woman I told you we met on the train, and who made such a hit with Jim," she explained furiously to Mrs. Kramer.

But Jim himself came in now, his tanned face a little flushed, and his eyes flashing with controlled anger.

"Now, Madeleine, don't go shouting at Mrs. Lauren in that rotten way. Act refined, can't you? She didn't take it, and I guess it ain't her fault if her old man's a crook," he said, forcing himself between Madeleine and Sally, and catching Madeleine's white wrist in his lean hand. By this time she, too, was reduced to incoherent tears.

"Well, I know, Jim, but I'm so mad," she whimpered meekly.

"Was this the chance you told me about? Of course

it was! Oh, my dears, I'm so sorry! Ever since I left home I've been so resentful that this old man that we never even knew should make all this trouble for Peter and me and our children, and here he's gone and dragged you into it, too. It don't seem right," Sally cried. "It just ain't fair, is it?"

"Well, there's no use getting mad at each other, is there?" Jim said sensibly. "It's just our hard luck, and we think we have to take it out on somebody, but I guess we'll have to be good sports and make the best of it."

"That's just how Peter would talk," Sally said gratefully. Perhaps he suspected she was paying him the most extravagant compliment she could pay any man.

They invited her to dinner, and Sally, with the innate tact that endeared her to people, accepted their invitation.



## *Chapter Thirteen*

### PETER BLINKS AT THE SUN

#### I

SALLY had been gone almost a week when Peter discovered Nancy's devotion to Mrs. Swan. Nancy's hair was the first indication he had, but he didn't realize its significance until she developed a southern accent overnight. Her voice softened and deepened; she forgot all about her "r's" and drawled her long "i's" to "ahs".

She plaited her hair in broad, flat braids, and wrapped them around her small head, twisting an old blue ribbon in them, with a tiny bow tucked at the front. It was when Peter was passing Mrs. Swan's yard and saw her digging up bulbs that he noticed her shapely head was crowned with lustreless brown braids. Then he realized who was responsible for the metamorphosis of Nancy.

"Hello, there, Mr. Lauren. You have a surprise at your house," Mrs. Swan called gaily to him, her large brown eyes smiling at him frankly.

"That so?" said Peter guardedly, not slackening appreciably in his brisk walk. He always felt haste when Mrs. Swan spoke to him in her soft, southern voice.

"Nancy's made a cake, and put your name on it with icing! Oh, I've told you! But you ought to know, so

you can be prepared to be right pleased with the child. She's worked all afternoon over it," Mrs. Swan said, coming close to the fence and rubbing her cheek with the back of the hand that held the trowel.

"I expect you helped her," Peter stammered, for want of something better to say. A woman oughtn't look at a man like that.

"Well, I did a little bit." She laughed a soft little tinkle. "She's certainly precious, your little girl. And she takes life so seriously. Does she get that from you, Mr. Lauren?"

"Well, hardly." What did she think he was, an old minister, or something? Then, to Nancy's defense, "She doesn't take herself so seriously when you really know her."

"Is that supposed to put me in my place, Mr. Lauren? Well, of course, I couldn't expect to know her as well as you do for a week more, at least. But I'll make you a little bet that one week from to-night I'll know things about your Nancy that you don't even suspect."

That's a bold thing to say to a man! What did the woman think she was, anyway?

"Well, you look like a pretty smart lady when it comes to knowing people, so I'm not going to bet with you," he said audaciously. Better hurry along. Mrs. Burgess was drawing back her lace curtain. The darn on the shoulder blade.

So Peter tipped his hat and hurried off, wondering if Mrs. Swan was laughing at him for running away, and not daring to look back to find out.



One thing led to another. Mrs. Swan had a charming, skillful way of putting the things that lead to each other in convenient sequence. She slipped into the foreground of Peter's and Nancy's and even gruff little Eric's days so quietly that they didn't realize that they were all fascinated with her, and thinking about her much of the time. She had a completely disarming way of making little delightful gifts to one. Prepared to snub her, and keep the children from becoming acquainted with her in the beginning, Peter found himself defenseless against her pretty little generosity. She was like a wellbred child that offers you things it would be rude to refuse.

"Everyone has been so nice to us since you went away," he wrote to Sally. "Mrs. Swan gave Nancy a surprise party the other afternoon and invited all the children in the neighborhood. Some of them couldn't go, but they had a great time," he reported loyally.

Nancy's version of the party was more enlightening. "Mother, I hate this old neighborhood. I'll be glad when we can move some place else, where people aren't so nasty. The women around here are jealous and catty. They don't understand a really fine person. When you come home, please be very sweet to dear Mrs. Swan. She is a wonderful woman, Mother." Nancy made no direct mention of the party. Her ardor and rage were too fresh and poignant to be written about.

But, with the chivalry of youth, Nancy loved her

Mrs. Swan a hundred times more because of the little neighborhood slight. And the party would have been so beautiful, too, if the mothers hadn't been so jealous and nasty! Mrs. Swan had prepared it all of a sudden, in her charming, easy way, inviting the children on Friday afternoon, as they passed her house on the way home from school. They were to come to luncheon and spend the afternoon at her house the next day, in Nancy's honor. The children had been awkward and pleased, and completely mystified at their mother's reception of the invitations. Mrs. Drake and Mrs. Kelly and Mrs. Burgess ran back and forth to each other's houses and whispered indefinitely—then went back home, firm-lipped and immovable as granite in their decision.

Mrs. Swan's negro cook, Mattie, had prepared a wonderful luncheon on the long table in the sun-parlor. It was all lacy-white and sparkling with silver, with a low basket of roses in the center. There were things children love for luncheon—delicate fried chicken, potato balls, orange marmalade and little biscuits just big enough for two bites, and fruit salad with maraschino cherries. There was ice cream, too, in thick, colored slices, and hot chocolate and lady fingers, and a tiny paper basket of salted nuts at each place.

Mrs. Swan wore a thin green dress, and green slippers. She had tucked a yellow rosebud in her brown braids, and her bare throat was encircled with a rope of small pearls. Nancy felt like crying when she looked at her. She was unbearably beautiful!

The two giggling Walter girls came to the party,

because Mrs. Walter had so recently moved into the neighborhood that no one felt any responsibility about warning her of the dangerous Mrs. Swan. Mrs. Walter wasn't a Fulton Friend. Half-witted Essie James came, because her mother never could keep track of her, and Essie had a way of forgetting instructions she didn't want to remember.

Mrs. Swan didn't seem to realize that the children had been kept at home on purpose. That was the one thing that made the afternoon possible for Nancy.

"Well, I guess we didn't invite them in time. I reckon their mothers had already planned their afternoon," Mrs. Swan said sweetly, when no one else came. Nancy rose gallantly to the occasion, being as gay as she knew how, so the darling wouldn't suspect that her heart was breaking because of these stupid people of her neighborhood. Before luncheon was over, no pretense was necessary. Mrs. Swan was so jolly, and everything was so delicious, that the party was a success in spite of itself. Even Eric, who had tried to escape when he saw none of his colleagues were present to support him, enjoyed himself.

After luncheon, Mrs. Swan played Beethoven's "Minuet in G" on her harp. It stood in the golden window of the sitting room, and the vines that grew outside made a tapestry curtain against which her head was silhouetted. Nancy watched her a few minutes; then she had to close her eyes. She was too exquisite!

Essie asked her to play "Yankee Doodle."

## 3

"And then what?" Mrs. Swan's voice prompted.

"Probably it don't interest you to hear all this stuff. Women don't care much about how things work, so long as they keep workin'," said Peter modestly.

"Oh, but I want you to tell me. I think it's perfectly fascinating. So then, the little wheel that's connected with the lever turns, and that drives the piston," Mrs. Swan encouraged.

Peter was telling her shyly about his invention—his wonderful, breath-taking invention that was going to send them all over the hill to prosperity one of these days. Sally was inclined to take the invention not quite seriously, he felt, and it disappointed him a little. She was quite frank in not understanding the mystery of it, and willing to wait until Peter sold it to some manufacturer before she banked any hopes upon it.

But Mrs. Swan had a womanly awe regarding it. And besides, she had a tremendous faith that it would work out as Peter had planned. She had found the only weak spot in Peter's armor.

"If she didn't wear that funny perfume, I'd think she was the most wonderful woman I ever saw," Peter said to himself—"next to Sally." She had such sweet, rollicking ways with the children, and was at the same time so understanding of them! She made Peter feel always like playing himself, when she used to come over with the children after dinner. Wherever she was, she made you feel that some festivity was about to begin.

"You're such a serious boy," she said to Peter. And Peter felt ardently eager to show her how unserious he could be if he wanted to. There was something sweet about her calling him a boy—Peter, who had been a man since he was fourteen years old. But it was plain that Emily Swan didn't consider him all boy. Peter felt she was too impressed with his ability and his knowledge of machinery for that. "The charm of a boy and the capability of a man," were Mrs. Swan's words. He said them over to himself and felt a little foolish.

"I want to know your wife better. We three can have such lovely times together when she comes back. I think she's been a little stiff about knowing me. Why?" Emily questioned in her arch way, as they sat before the ugly latrobe in Sally's fussy little drawing room. Emily, her naughty feet twinkling in rhinestone buckled slippers, lay on Sally's "chaste lounge." Eric and Nancy sat on the floor, playing parchesi, and squealing every once in a while when one of them made a fortunate shake of the dice.

"Well, you see, Sally has never known anyone like you," Peter said.

"Why, isn't everyone like me, Mr. Lauren?" Mrs. Swan exclaimed idly, smiling at him innocently with her brown eyes.

"Well, I meant Sally has never known anyone who had so many clothes, and could play the harp, and had been to Venice," Peter explained; and then realized with a sudden flush how disgustingly disloyal that was to Sally—Sally who felt that such things counted so



much, and who would rather die than admit that her knowledge of them came from her little novels and the once-in-a-while movie. These things seemed to matter awfully to Sally. Now as for himself . . . . .

Mrs. Swan laughed her intoxicating laugh, throwing back her dainty head and fluttering her two hands before her face.

"Why, my dear, how funny! Those things are so little! I'm just like everyone else—a little more lonely perhaps, and a little less sufficient unto myself." She said it wistfully. "You can't think how much I want a friend like your Sally."

No use trying to put all of this in letters to Sally, thought Peter. Things like that looked different on paper. He would wait until she came home, and then she would understand how sweet Mrs. Swan was, and how much she needed Sally's friendship.



## *Chapter Fourteen*

### THE TRIAL OF JOLDS

#### 1

WHILE waiting for Joles' case to be called in court, Sally went often to see the old man. He alternated between his almost Puckish insouciance and extreme remorse. Sally suspected that under the influence of her sympathy, he dramatized himself, until he was reveling in gloomy admiration of his own tragic figure.

"You don't know," he said miserably, his blue eyes as somber as they had been mischievous. "Something has followed me around all my life, keepin' me from havin' happiness. Yust when I think I see it, somethin' always yanks it away from me. I worked all my life, but I never got nothin' out of it. Magnold didn't see nothin' in life but workin' and bein' good. I tried that for a while, but I almos' went crazy. Why, honest, she was willin' to spend an evenin' yust settin' on the steps, not sayin' nothin'. Gave me the creeps, that business!" He brooded a while.

"Then Annie—I thought Annie would be better for me. She liked music and laughin' and jokin', and she had cute little ways about her. Don't matter much now—but that usta make a lot o' difference oncet. But she had a damn temper, and she was sorta dirty in some ways. I don't know. . . .

"Oncet there was a woman . . . . I was takin' tintypes with a circus carnival, and we was passing through Louisiana. This woman had a little house outside the city, and a garden, and a piano. I got goin' out there while we was in town—yust sorta drop by, and maybe she'd move a table out under the grapevines, and we'd have coffee and cakes. Oncet in the moonlight she broke a bunch of grapes and pinned 'em in her hair. She'd sing, too—words without much sense, but kinda soft tunes that'd make you dizzy and tired, sorta, like takin' a drink. Oncet she read somethin'. I yust can't remember what it was about, but the words kept stayin' in my mind. I hear 'em now, sorta singing, sometimes. I don't know what it was about that woman—I ain't even sure what her name was—but she sorta seemed to me like somethin' I needed and never knowed."

Sally sensed, but only half understood, Joles' desires. "There must be something in him like a string in a piano that needs a tuning fork to make it answer," she thought, but she could not say that to Joles.

"You are making excuses for yourself," she told him, a little sternly. "You act like a boy finding a way to excuse himself for mistakes. Why don't you realize that you're a grown man with grandchildren who should be proud of you, and that you have scattered unhappiness through lots of people's lives because you were too selfish to be responsible."

The mention of his grandchildren threw Joles into even deeper gloom.

"Yeh, ole damn good-for-nothin'—always messin'

up somethin'! But God knows I didn't mean no harm to anybody. I yust don't have the knack of getting along in the world."

Sally felt she was accomplishing something from her own viewpoint. It was good to be able to feel kindly toward this incorrigible old blunderer, with his sordid solutions of life, and his misguided quest for something to lift him above himself. She kissed him shyly on the lowest point of his chin when she left, to tell him mutely that she understood a little, and that if it were her life alone through which he was scattering unhappiness, she could forgive him.

## 2

Joles' lawyer was jubilant at the end of the first session of the trial. The old man was so dignified and intelligent in his manner on the stand, and so entirely guileless and manifestly eager to have the plaintiff convinced that she had made a mistake in imagining that she had entrusted funds to him, that the judge and jury were nonplussed. Mrs. Kramer seemed so bewildered by Joles' attitude, and her lawyer so angry and futile in his attempts to prove that she had indeed given Joles the money, in spite of the absence of any substantiating evidence, that the case was continued one week, in order to give the plaintiff more time to collect evidence.

There was really no more evidence that could be collected. Mrs. Kramer had drawn the money out of the bank in cash, and had kept it overnight under her

pillow. She had given it to Joles the next day, with no one present to witness the transaction. She was so impressed with his sincerity and friendliness that she had not thought of insulting his good intentions by asking for a receipt. Joles' bank account showed no deposit of the \$4300. Indeed, the \$76.37 which had been to his credit had been decreased by \$35 shortly after the date set by Mrs. Kramer for the transaction. Joles testified that he had bought a new suit with the \$35.

Mrs. Kramer's lawyer was unable to locate Annie, and if Joles and his attorney knew of her whereabouts, they kept a discreet silence. Annie had disappeared from her flat.

Sally was distressed by the disgraceful performance. That all of the people concerned should know that Joles had taken the money seemed to her sufficient proof. This baffling business of convincing twelve indifferent strangers and a suave judge seemed to her a parody on justice. She felt like standing up and telling the judge what she thought about it, but of course she couldn't do that. Even if he *were* Peter's father, she was outraged that luck should favor him so shamelessly. She wondered what those two smooth-voiced lawyers would do if she were to jump up in her seat and say, "You oughta be ashamed of yourselves, making all this fuss over whether or not you can prove something that everyone knows is true. Justice isn't a question of tricking the truth into words. Why don't you do something about helping Joles behave himself, and paying the money back to poor Mrs. Kramer?"



But neither of the lawyers seemed to pay the slightest attention to the little woman on the last bench of the courtroom. Joles was allowed to go free, under his lawyer's bond.

The partial triumph seemed to cheer him not at all. He had enjoyed the trial enormously, because it had given him a chance to make a favorable appearance before a number of strangers. But as soon as the excitement of the trial was over, he was incurably depressed.

Sally went with him to find a new room for the week of the continuance, and then looked up a late afternoon train back to Des Moines. Joles helped her gallantly up and down the curbs, and insisted on buying her a box of candy and some magazines to shorten the trip.

"Good-bye, girlie. Maybe you shoulda come to look after me earlier; then nothin' woulda happened," he said in his sentimental way, shifting the blame for his misdemeanors, as he always did. "Maybe if I coulda seen my little grandchildren like other men, I mighta amounted to somethin'. Yust a clean, sweet little woman like you behind a man helps him behave himself. Well, 'sall over now."

"My goodness, this is no time for you to be makin' 'all over' speeches, Father Lauren. You brace up and see if you can't make us all proud of you yet. You work out your debt to Mrs. Kramer, and then see how much better you feel about yourself," Sally said, as they waited for the train to go.

"Well, good-bye, and don' think too hard of me.

I ain't bad fella, I yust can't seem to get onto the knack of livin'," he said with tears in his old eyes.

"Gracious, you sound like I wasn't ever coming back. You know I'm coming next Wednesday," Sally laughed.

But when Wednesday came, there was no going back.

## 3

Magnold wanted to hear every movement Sally had made since she left Des Moines. She followed her around the little house like a child, while she was taking off her coat and hat and shaking out her blouses and hanging them on coat-hangers in the closet in Peter's old room.

"Is his hair curly still?" Magnold asked with tremulous lips, almost begging Sally not to tell her if it had fallen out, or had become straggling and uncared for.

"Oh, beautiful and white as snow, but proud looking, you know, Mother Lauren—curly and heavy as a boy's. He tosses it back when he talks to you."

"Yes, I know," said Magnold quietly.

"His hands . . . ." Magnold began, afraid to ask.

"Yes, like a woman's—long and slender, and still soft and young. How could he have such beautiful hands?"

"They were always beautiful," Magnold said.

But she insisted on knowing his weaknesses, too. "Did he tell you many reasons why somebody else was

to blame for his trouble?" she asked sternly. "Did he blame me, and his father—and—that woman—and all his friends?"

"Yes, like a weak little boy, Mother Lauren," Sally admitted, spreading fragrant crab apple jelly on the thick, warm bread Magnold had made for supper. "It was queer, though. I felt older than he, Mother Lauren. He seemed such a naughty little boy to me. I wanted to spank him and make him sorry for his naughtiness, and then rock him to sleep and make him forget it."

"Yeh, women always feel that way about Joles," said Magnold, cryptically and without humor.

Later in the evening, when they were sitting again before the fat stove, Magnold knitting stockings for the missionary box of her church, and Sally embroidering forget-me-nots on an underskirt for Nancy, Sally suggested that the older woman accompany her to Millhaven the next week. Immediately Magnold drew back into her reserve.

"There is nothing for me to go for," she said, almost angrily.

"You could help him, Mother Lauren. He might want to see you, and you could help him start all over. It might be the making of him," Sally urged timidly.

"Naw, it would do no good. We need never see each other again," she said firmly. She had little more to say that evening, and was almost rough to Sally, when her daughter-in-law kissed her good-night.

## 4

In the morning a thick letter came addressed to Magnold. When she opened it an envelope for Sally dropped out. Both sat down on the step of the back porch. They had been gathering up dead vines to burn. Magnold squatted low, holding her letter, written in Norwegian, close to her dim old eyes. Sally read her own letter apprehensively.

"Dear Girlie: "Dont think too hard of me. I know you are ashamed of me, but I did the best I could, and it wasn't very good," Joles began to Sally.

"When you get this, everything will be O.K. I'm going to be in a accident and settle things that way. I have \$10,000 life insurance made out to Annie. When she collects it, please see that she gives \$4500 to Mrs. Kramer, and sends \$2,000 to Magnold. She's going to kick, but you can scare her easy. Show her this letter and tell her that if she don't do it, you'll let the Insurance Company know I got killed on purpose, and then she won't get nothing. She has got a damn temper, but she sees sense. Please look after this for me, Girlie.

"God bless you, Girlie, and don't think too hard of me. Tell Peter his old Dad use to think of him often and what a good little shaver he was."

Sally looked across at Magnold. The old woman had dropped her letter in her lap. Her worn hands fluttered at her throat and her chin had its old, ecstatic tilt. Sally looked away. What old Joles had written to his wife in his own language had somehow balanced

whatever debt he may have owed her. Sally slipped into the house and left her alone on the steps, her old eyes transfigured with a wordless wonder.

In less than an hour came a telegram to Sally from Joles' lawyer, saying merely, "Joles Lauren instantly killed by an automobile last night. Awaiting instructions."

She straightened Magnold's house, set out a cold luncheon and then came to the back door, dressed ready to go over to her mother. Magnold didn't need her any more and Sally was tired and in need of mothering.

Magnold was burning little sticks in the center of the yard. The wind whipped her dress; her gray hair had the look of powerful wings about her lifted face.

"You know about Joles, Sally?" she asked. "Well, it's all right now."

"I know. I'm going over to Mother's. I'll come back to-morrow," Sally said, and left her with the fire made of vines that had died.





## *Chapter Fifteen*

### PETER ON A STRANGE PATH

#### 1

**S**OMETHING had happened to Peter.

The first Sunday Sally was away, Peter took the children alone on their Sunday afternoon outing after church, carrying a neat box of Nancy's thin, damp sandwiches, and buying bananas and little cakes at the fruit stand where they transferred to the Chain Bridge car. By the time the second Sunday arrived, it seemed natural and delightful to invite Mrs. Swan to go with them. The children thought of it and Emily seemed exceedingly pleased.

"A dull old friend of mine was coming to take me out driving in his car, but I can explain politely that I'd much rather go with you. You see, he is quite old and settled, and will never get over liking me; but you are young and this Sunday will never come again," she told Nancy laughingly.

"But there will be other Sundays when we shall like you," Nancy said shyly. "You sound as though next Sunday might be different just because we are young."

"Well, we'll make no promises about next Sunday. But we will enjoy this one while we have it," Mrs. Swan replied in her smiling way.

She would go only on condition that she be allowed

to bring the luncheon. It was a long time, she said, since she had had a chance to carry sweet pickles in a jelly glass and wrap deviled eggs in waxed paper.

She wore a gray, wool coat, and small gray oxfords, with a tam, the warm vermilion of certain mushrooms, pulled rakishly over her dusky hair. There was high color in her oval cheeks, and her dark eyes were bright. A soft vermilion scarf she wore blew in the wind and kept brushing Peter's cheek as they walked along the towpath of the canal.

They built a little fire to roast sausages, and toast marshmallows. The smoke had a tantalizing fragrance you could never forget if you lived to be a hundred years old. It was a magic day—more exhilaratingly dangerous than early spring.

"The sort of heaven I believe in is a picture gallery, with days you have made for yourself along the corridors," Emily said in her dreamy voice. "You must spend eternity walking up and down before them, studying them. There are many of my pictures I shall hurry past with my eyes closed. But when I am a remorseful, bored old spirit, a little frightened by the other pictures, I'll stand long and often before this day. Nancy's hair the color of maple trees, just turned bronze; Eric scuffling through the leaves and chewing an apple; the blue smoke rising like music in the air; and two little clouds floating in the bottom of the canal."

"Can't I come into the picture?" Peter asked.

"And you, with a startled look in your eyes, that needs interpreting, and two little wrinkles on your

forehead that came from pretending that you never wanted things you couldn't have," she continued. She tipped back her head and half closed her eyes, two fringed dark crescents . . . . She had a mad, magic way about her!

The children hiked to the next lock, but Emily was not used to strenuous walking, so she and Peter sat in a scarlet bower of wild grape leaves, with asters waving like banners in the tall, golden grass.

She pulled off her bright tam, and her dusky braids were misty with the wind. She leaned toward him; her hair tingled across his cheek.

"What are you thinking?" She laughed at him. "I dare you!"

"Nothing—just wondering why some days have this queer way about them. It's like a row of electric lights in frosted bulbs passing you one by one; then suddenly comes one that dazzles you with light."

"Like to-day? Yes, doesn't it. Have you found, the way I have, it's the little, simple things seeming somehow wonderful that are the real test? Playing with brilliant people who say clever things, having extravagant adventures, doesn't count in wonder nearly as much as simple things. I can't put it into words, Peter Lauren, but maybe you feel what I mean? A horse-back ride I took one morning at dawn in Kentucky; sewing some little fancy work one afternoon in a sunny bay window that used to belong to me; walking in the rain with my dog four years ago—those times stand out for me for no particular reason," she said softly.

This was queer talk for Peter. He felt stimulated

and not himself—no precedents to guide him. He was suddenly looking down an unexpected corridor into another world—a way of thinking that had nothing to do with paying the Building Association each month or of roofs that leak, or of getting the children to bed on time. . . .

Emily looked at him suddenly. "Why are you so afraid of loving life a little, Peter?" She whispered it.

"I'm not. I love it very much. What do you mean?"

"There is a restraint about you—a something you cannot put into words. You draw yourself away from yourself, as though you were afraid. Are you afraid?" she probed gently.

"Afraid of what?"

"Well—of me! And of you, too!" She said it boldly. Peter was surprised into revelation.

"Only because I don't understand us. You are like discovering that I have another sense—a sort of new combination of all the others. It upsets me," he admitted huskily.

"Don't be upset, dear boy. And don't try to be picking it apart to see how it is put together. Why not just be glad about it for a little while?" she asked softly, with her sweet confident laugh. And then, somehow, not seeming to move towards him at all, she kissed him, holding his face with her two fragrant hands. Peter crushed her to him in a way that terrified him.

"I mustn't be doing this—Nancy—Eric! What's

the matter with me?" He was crying, tilting her head back against his shoulder and burying his face against the cool column of her throat. A little fluttering at the base of it, like a white bird . . . .

"So dear—so dear," Emily crooned.

But as suddenly as it came, it went, leaving Peter white and mystified.

"I beg your pardon. I don't know what to say," he floundered weakly.

"There's nothing to say, my dear. Why spoil it?" she asked, looking at him for a moment before she spoke.

"We are not children. Happiness is such a fugitive in this world. Why apologize when we find it for a moment? There is no need to pretend about it. We love each other for ten minutes this afternoon! Let's be proud of it, and if it lasts only ten minutes let's remember them as beautiful things. Don't let's cheapen them by thinking of the way the rest of the world would look at them if it knew." Her voice was gentle and yet passionate, as though she were defending a child of hers from an adult who did not, or would not understand.

"But—I love Sally," Peter said in his honest way, looking at her fiercely.

"Of course you do, Peter Lauren. You would not be you if you didn't. I use the bass G on my harp when I play Rubenstein's 'Melody in F.' It is beautiful, like a name whispered in a dear voice. But because it is beautiful, that doesn't mean that I must keep it and never play anything else on it again. Love



is something like that," she explained. "We have played the bass G into our friendship. You recognize it as something which spoke to you in your older love. It need not frighten you. And it need not spoil our friendship. It glorifies it, and it will exalt everything that it enters into as long as you live, Peter Lauren."

## 2

The next two days were alternate exaltation and degradation for Peter. He felt he had done some terrible thing that everyone who looked at him could detect.

But he felt this only half-heartedly. With the rest of him he knew a queer ecstasy he had forgotten, or never known. He searched for words for it defiantly. Like a clean dive from a springboard, down through green water, past the shadows of rocks, and then up again in the sunlight, shaking water-drops from your eyes, and cutting the water with powerful strokes. Like finding involute fern fronds growing by a brook, and lying in the silence through the afternoon, dreaming and imagining you saw them unfolding. Like turning a breach-plug and waiting breathlessly while the micrometer tested its accuracy. There was an intangible triumph about it that was humility, too.

He looked at strangers he passed on the street with a new interest. Were they carrying sparks of rapture underneath their composure? That furtive-eyed man who needed a shave; that woman grown too stout; was there some dazzling moment they kept locked in their hearts, that would be cheap and sordid if they took it out and held it in the daylight?

Peter felt a new tolerance towards the rest of the world—a key to many situations he had not understood. He listened less disgustedly to the gossip of the men about each other's shabby romances. Underneath, stripped of all their masculine necessity for flippancy and worldly wisdom, he wondered if they didn't feel about their own inexplicable loves as he felt about this sudden thing that had disarmed him. He wondered if it were not merely the eternal talking of people that made strange, fugitive experiences. If only people wouldn't talk!

"Nobody oughta judge," he said to himself. "It's just something you can't make rules about. Me, of all men in the world! Why, there's nobody on earth for me but Sally, and yet if I didn't keep hold of myself by main force, I'd go gallopin' after her, with her soft, teasin' voice, and her slim hands. Nobody oughta judge. You can't see it like it is unless it happens to be you that it happens to. Nobody oughta judge. Everybody's in the right."

He read ribald accounts in the newspapers about a milkman who disappeared with an unknown woman, and the mother of two children who eloped with the insurance collector. He remembered the shoemaker's wife, and how angry he had been when he heard of her running away. He had a new feeling for them, instead of his old disgust for irregularity. He did not condone it, you must know. He felt the way God must feel—or mothers, if they could be told all about it.

He tried to sober himself and prod his conscience by

reciting to himself the ugly outline of his unfathomable feeling. "Man with coupla kids and a good wife. Had to go away, and as soon as she was gone, he took up with a flashy widow. Nice guy—tricked into ten minutes' boneheadedness by a little hair blowing on his face, and some perfume. Just like his cheap father!" But it shamed him more that he could degrade the ten minutes thus than that they had happened.

By the third day his turbulence had congealed into hurt resentment against Sally for going away on a vacation and leaving him for so long, with no one to look after the children except whatever good-hearted, well-meaning neighbors would come to their rescue. A woman ought to know better.

## 3

Mrs. Swan was prepared to continue the friendship as though the G string had never been plucked. She was cool and sweet in her greeting to him when he passed her house in the morning, and if there was a look in her eyes, she kept it well controlled. She had neither self-consciousness nor conscience, it seemed.

"Aren't we going to be friends any more?" she asked him, when he came to get Nancy at her bedtime on Tuesday evening. Nancy was making something for Mother's birthday, and Mrs. Swan was helping her. It required a great deal of time, and was a surprise even for Peter. This, he thought was rather strategic of them.

"I'm very busy. I'm working on some plans to show

the boss for a new machine. Takes all my time just now," Peter said, avoiding her eyes.

"Poor you," she said lightly, with a disconcerting look which put him at a disadvantage. Had she no decency at all, the wild, slender thing?



## *Chapter Sixteen*

### LITTLE UNSAID WORDS

#### 1

MAGNOLD took charge of Joles' body, with unexpected ability to cope with the situation. Only when she saw him for the first time in the undertaker's ornate parlor, his shapely hands crossed in unnatural meekness on his breast, and an expression of baffled wistfulness on his unguarded face, did she show grief.

After that she seemed like an envisioned person, a smile on her thin lips, her eyes alight, as though seeing things not visible to other eyes. She wore her old bonnet, with a clump of nodding black cotton lilacs at the front, and a long black skirt, billowing about her uncorseted figure. Little boys she passed on the street stopped playing to look after her; but they never laughed.

"Don't let's tell Peter anythin' about it. He won't ask. No sense his ever knowin' whether Joles is dead or not," she said to Sally, before her return to Washington. Sally wondered if the old woman suspected the grim menace Peter had built up for himself from the memory of his father.

#### 2

Annie was a bit difficult to handle. "It was my



money paid the insurance. I oughta have all of it without dividin' it between his other mistakes," she insisted sullenly. Reluctant to trust Joles' lugubrious secret in such careless hands, Sally at length had to show her his letter. A half loaf seemed better than none, to Annie, so she gave in.

"That soft old fool almost kissed my hand when she saw her old money comin' back to her. She thinks I'm a hero for givin' it to her. She oughta know I wouldn't give her a nickel unless you made me," Annie reported to Sally after she had taken the check to Mrs. Kramer.

Annie couldn't help feeling that she had come out ahead on Joles' proposition, even so.

"He was gettin' so onery there was no livin' with him, anyway," she said to Sally, tearfully. "He was a good friend and all that, but nobody don't ever know what I had to put up with. Worse'n a woman about some things. I usta tell him he'd die from bein' so clean. He usta pay for his laundry first; then if there was anythin' left, we ate."

"I didn' think he had it in him, though, to go and do such a thing. He was sorta scary about things, too. Usta walk a block to keep from passin' a place where the ambulance was stoppin' on the street. Now me—I like a good accident once in a while. 'Course I don' want nobody to get hurt, but if they're already hurt, I might's well look at 'em. He was awful, though, honest! Wouldn' take a mouse outa the trap!" Then she added apologetically, "In a way, I think, considerin' everything, it was kinda heroic of Joles."

Annie insisted on wearing mourning, spasmodically.

It was smart black, with a coquettish veil cascading down her back, and a white, softening facing to her chic hat. It was the nearest she ever came to dignity. She said she couldn't stand the strain of mourning all the time, however; so intermittently she broke out in her beloved pink blouses and gay silk skirts, with hats of shiny satin, pink and glazed like French candy.

Sally's conscience troubled her not at all because she had helped Joles straighten his accounts with the world. The insurance company can afford that money: it's not like it was coming from some one person, she assured herself.

## 3

It had been a harrowing month, and Sally was glad to slip back into her own self in her own world again. She felt as though she had been ill a long time, passing through stage after stage of torturing delirium.

She looked a long time into the mirror on her refrigerator door that first afternoon she was home, feeling sure there must be some difference in her appearance, some mark of her experience. But she saw the same old Sally—her plump, sofa-cushion body, rigid and hard under the unrelenting corset and brassiere, her smooth hair brushed meekly from her forehead, and the double chin just faintly forming when she inclined her head.

It was difficult to invent chatty news of her trip. A month is a long time to account for, if you must conceal its real outlines. Besides, it seemed like two years

to Sally. She felt relieved that the children hadn't grown up!

The dull little ache from Mrs. Kelly's letter subsided a little when Peter held her in his arms a long time. "We've needed you so, Mother. You've spoiled us, I guess, because we can't get along without you very well," he said huskily.

"I hope you'll never have to again, Daddy," she told him.

"He will tell me about it in his dear, innocent way, after the children have gone to bed. He will say she is lonely and needs someone to be kind to her. I must pretend I haven't heard about it. I must be sweet. I know it's nothing," she told herself.

But Nancy's braids hurt her. She recognized Mrs. Swan in them. "You like my hair, Mother?" Nancy asked, turning her slender neck so her mother could see the back line she knew was becoming. "Don't you think it's more refined than that pompadour I used to wear?"

"It's nice, but a little too old for you, I'm afraid. Don't you think so?" She must not let the child think she disapproved of Mrs. Swan. That would antagonize the loyal little thing.

"Well, I'm getting old," Nancy cried triumphantly. "Mrs. Swan says I'm old enough to wear a corset waist, Mother. She says a girl's back needs support, or she has a dumpy figure when she gets to be thirty. Of course, some women think that when they're thirty they're too old to bother much about their figures. But Mrs. Swan says a woman should think about her ap-

pearance even when she's eighty. Hasn't she a lovely figure, Mother? Did you ever notice it?" she asked fervently.

"I know a woman who is more than sixty who has never worn a corset in her life. And she's so strong and beautiful she makes you think of a graceful old tree—or a boat meeting the waves," Sally said.

"Mother! No corset! I think that's disgusting," Nancy cried in her italicized young voice.

Eric stood close beside the kitchen table while Sally chopped the cabbage for cole slaw. He had hardly moved two feet from her since he rushed at her in the station, elbowing strangers out of his way and leaping on her with the frank joy of a loyal puppy.

"Mother, will you make some apple dumplin' sometime?" he asked in a whisper. "We've had the darnedest things to eat. 'Course Nancy did all right, but that Mrs. Swan kept puttin' fool notions in her head, and they didn't always come out very good. Shrimp wiggle! Darn fool truck like that," he said disgustedly.

The children sat up later than usual to hear all about Grandmother Graves, and Grandfather's church, and the ancient dog they used to play with, when they were babies and he was a pup.

After they had gone to bed, Sally waited for the story of Mrs. Swan, but it was not forthcoming.

"Your mother is wonderful, Peter. She has such a quiet wisdom about her. It's wonderful to have such a mother," she said when there was a pause in the trivial conversation.

"Is she still raising anise plants and horehound for foliage for her bouquets? Did she make you some apple-cake, when you went to see her?" Peter asked. He liked to talk about his mother, and he took boyish delight in hearing Sally praise her. He felt secure to-night, here in his home, suddenly righted again by the return of this efficient little woman. His wife, trusting and fond, here beside him in the dark; his son and daughter asleep in their rooms; his mother, mel-lowed and sweet in her old age, living away her tranquil life in her small, tidy house—all secure against the shadowy menace of his father's weakness that he feared might be his own, and that glamorous menace that had alighted on his life like a spangled butterfly, and then flown away.

He was at peace, except for one curious little disappointment. Sally, this dependent, devoted wife, was able to leave him alone for a month, merely because her mother had been ill—not even very ill, because she had taken Sally to her club meetings and her library committees.

He felt that he should tell Sally about the spangled butterfly, but he knew she wouldn't understand. She would smile and be sweet and sympathetic, but underneath she would be suspicious and a little hurt. It wasn't worth risking. Besides, he was too disappointed in realizing that Sally could leave him for a month and come back bright and cheery and full of gossipy news of her visit. It would do no good to tell her; she wouldn't understand. She could not realize that a man's senses could trick him for a while because of



frail hands and a lazy, caressing voice. Sally would be worried; she would magnify the importance of his ten minutes. It would make her unsure of herself—and of him. He fell asleep.

"He hasn't told me to-night; he never will. If it were nothing at all, he would have told me about it, casually. He doesn't mention her name. When the children spoke of her at dinner, he said nothing," Sally was saying to herself unhappily. "It is the first thing he has ever kept from me. I must not let it matter; it is such a little thing. He probably has forgotten all about it," she reassured herself, unconvincingly.

She found herself wondering if Peter's ridiculous fear that he had inherited his father's irresponsibility might not have a little foundation. Ridiculous! She must protect Peter from that thought all her life. No matter what else happened, she must never let him know of his father's embezzlement—not about Annie. Peter would take that to heart and brood over it. He would lose the confidence in himself he had built up so assiduously all these years. She would rather Peter lost his faith in her than that he lose it in himself. Now, if he had succumbed to weakness about the Swan woman, he would need Sally's confidence more than ever. If he mistrusted himself, he must never know the dreary outlines of his father's story. She fell asleep.

## 4

The neighborhood was like a group of children wait-

ing to see what punishment would be given an incorrigible one, now that teacher had come back. Sally had no doubt that they had all talked it over, and were speculating on what means she would take to punish Peter. She called her dignity and pride together and met them smilingly.

"It was sweet of you to write to me, my dear," she said to Mrs. Kelly, before that sympathetic neighbor had a chance to think she was avoiding the subject. "Peter had already told me about it, but of course it must have looked very naughty." She laughed heartily at the joke on the neighbors. Mrs. Kelly looked embarrassed.

"Well, I hope you didn't think I was nervy; but I know how it is. Joe ain't as bad as he was, but he used to be havin' his flings with everybody who'd look at him. I had a dressmaker here helpin' me when my sister Lena got married, and honest, it was scandalous the way Joe carried on with that woman. Right under my nose, too! So I says to him one day, right in front of her, 'Say,' I says, 'do you think I'm blind, or Miss Jarvis is a fool—which?' I says, right out. I hadta call him down in front of people lots of times. There was a clerk at the grocery store before you moved here—why, really, Mrs. Lauren, I was ashamed to look her in the face, the way Joe used to run his hands over her. I says to her finally, 'You just up and slap him next time he gets fresh. I wish you would.' She was a nice little thing, too, but not much sense."

So that was the way they took it—a sort of harmless prank, such as their children might be caught at. Sally

merely smiled, the best smile she could find, and said, "Well, Mr. Lauren isn't like that. I really wish he'd take more interest in the women folks."

"Well, you aren't going to mix in with that Mrs. Swan, are you?" Mrs. Kelly inquired dubiously.

"I don't know her very well. But I'll wait and see what she's like before I say," Sally declared generously.



## *Chapter Seventeen*

### SALLY FINDS A FRIEND

#### 1

SALLY immediately set about becoming better acquainted with Mrs. Swan. The first afternoon after her return, she went over to call.

"You've been so nice to my little family, I had to come and tell you how I appreciate it," she said nervously, when the other woman met her at the door.

"Well, it was worth being nice about, to have you come and see me," Mrs. Swan smiled, "though I must tell you that I have had the happiest time with your Nancy that I have known for years. There's something about a young girl—a keen sense of hidden beauty—that touches me more deeply than religion," she said earnestly.

She led Sally into her cozy little sitting room, furnished in low, dark furniture, with bright, hand-stenciled hangings and cushions. It was just before the epidemic of candlesticks for decoration, but Mrs. Swan had two tall, iron floor sticks, holding bright orange candles. There were orange tears on the twisted iron, showing that the candles were used for something besides decoration. Imagine burning such lovely things, Sally thought. Those candles cost thirty cents apiece!

Mrs. Swan offered her a chair with soft, orange

cushions tucked at the back. A low table was within reach of the chair, holding a blue bowl of nasturtiums the color of the candles. A hammered silver cigarette box lay beside the bowl, and a man's pipe lay on a book. The cigarette box shocked Sally acutely.

"It must be nice to be home after your visit," Mrs. Swan said in her friendly, soft voice. "You can't think how your family has missed you. It must be marvelous to know that you are the most wonderful being in the world to them."

Sally flushed. She wondered if this were what Mrs. Swan would be saying if there were anything between herself and Peter.

"You see, I love them very much," she answered simply; then wished she hadn't said exactly that. Mrs. Swan mustn't feel sorry for her. She mustn't be spared.

After an hour, Mrs. Swan's droll looking negro cook brought in a tea wagon laden with dainty sandwiches, small frosted cakes and a silver teapot. Sally loved tea wagons; they were a symbol to her of the luxury of well-bred afternoons, climaxed perfectly by delicious tea. It was the vision of a tea wagon that came into her mind whenever she spoke, as she frequently did, of "doing things right."

Mrs. Swan was all that she should have been, presiding over her tea—solicitous, unhurried and amusingly charming.

## 2

Mrs. Swan came frequently to Sally's house those



autumn afternoons, bringing a dainty piece of sewing, or some charming bit out of a book that she wanted to read to Sally.

The first visit was nearly ruined for Sally because of a torturing indecision as to whether it would be less awkward to serve tea in her clumsy way on a tray, or to forget it. She wanted Mrs. Swan to know that she knew tea was part of an afternoon, but she couldn't bear to have her see the chipped, enameled tray, and the not-thin-enough rosebud cups—not to mention the brown crockery teapot which constituted her service. But she had some delicious devil cake, and she knew how to make savory sandwiches out of pimento cheese and currants and rye bread. The sandwiches won, and she decided to reveal the miserable tray.

"If you'll excuse me, I'll find us some tea," she said in her prim little way.

"Let me come with you. I love your dear little gingham kitchen. Nancy let me fuss around it sometimes. May I come, please?" Mrs. Swan asked. Flushed with pride, Sally wondered timidly if Mrs. Swan's graciousness was quite unconscious.

Whenever she came for an afternoon with Sally, Emily Swan always left in plenty of time to avoid meeting Peter. When Sally mentioned her, she thought Peter looked uncomfortable. When she suggested that they invite her over for Sunday dinner, he protested vehemently.

"What for? She's got plenty of company always hangin' 'round her house. If you want to invite someone, why don't you invite poor Miss Adelaide Pres-

ton? She eats her dinner at a boarding house, and every Sunday they have the same dinner," he said.

## 3

Before many weeks Sally had completely lost her fear of Mrs. Swan, and indeed had developed a comforting pity for the lonely woman. Mrs. Swan had so many things Sally yearned for. The fact that they didn't seem to compensate for the things Sally herself had, helped Sally bear her own privations more gallantly.

"You are so fortunate," Mrs. Swan often said. "You have all the ingredients for happiness at the same time. All my life I have been trying to find a recipe that didn't call for more than I happened to have at the moment, but something is always lacking. At one time or another in my whole life I have possessed them all, but they never belonged to me at the same time."

"I had a baby," she said abruptly one afternoon. "She only lived a little while—five months and eleven days. She would be thirteen years old in January, almost as old as Nancy." Mrs. Swan's face had the snuffed-out look of a burned candle, as she spoke of her child. Sally turned her head away quickly.

"And then your husband died too?" she asked sympathetically, after a moment.

"No. Then he divorced me." Mrs. Swan was herself again, defiantly bright and beautiful. "I was naughty, you see. I played with a boy—my husband was twenty years older than I. His children were

grown, and he didn't care much. He left me alone so much, after the baby died. It was a choice between madness or gaiety for me. So I was very gay," she fluttered her slim hands jauntily, but her lips trembled as she said it.

"Oh, my dear!" exclaimed Sally compassionately. "And what became of the boy? Did you love him? Couldn't you have been happy with him?"

"Not for long. He was just a means to an end for me. We didn't really love each other, after a while. You see, he had a wife who hated him so much that she wouldn't divorce him. At first I thought this other woman had ruined my life, but then I knew that we really couldn't have been happy together, except for a romantic little while.

"You know, Mrs. Lauren, your self plays ironical tricks on you. It's awfully easy to get a little crust over yourself—a crust of sadness, or of industry, or of gaiety. You put it on first as a protection, and soon you find you can't get it off. You don't particularly like wearing it, but only once in a while is there a little crack where you, yourself, can get through."

Sally hated herself for the suspicions she had had about Emily Swan. She felt a maternal tenderness toward the other woman—a yearning to do something tangible for her, to show her sympathy and understanding and contrition. So she began to crochet the pink nightgown yoke.

Emily's husband had died two years before, and had left Emily a large portion of his estate. In view of the fact that the will had been drawn up a year before

he divorced his young wife, his three children were contesting it. The case had dragged along for some time. Emily was singularly indifferent as to the outcome of it.

"It doesn't greatly matter to me. I have enough to live on comfortably, and if I have the money, I sha'n't be able to be any happier, probably," she told Sally. This quixotic indifference to money, which had always been such a foremost factor in Sally's life, made Mrs. Swan more than ever a sort of fairy-tale character.

## 4

The pink nightgown yoke became a symbol to Nancy. Through the long weeks of its creation, the girl dreaded its completion and hated herself for feeling as she did. Nancy's feelings were a queer mixture of chagrin that her mother should think such a pink atrocity beautiful, and of tenderness toward her for being so simple and sweet in intention. She alternated between hating her mother for insulting Mrs. Swan with such a gift, and hating Mrs. Swan for fear she might laugh at the crudity of the gift.

"I wish I could afford some nice silk to make this up," Sally said often, as she worked out the intricate butterfly and exuberant rose design. Sally had never owned a silk nightgown in her life.

"Of course I could make it up in pink voile. Don't you think that'd be kinda pretty?" she asked Nancy hopefully. "Well, I guess I'll just make some big

rosettes of blue ribbon and put it in a nice box. I think she'll be pleased."

Mrs. Swan was pleased. It was all she could do to keep the tears out of her eyes when Sally brought her gift over one day, tied up in a white box, with Peter's underwear tag torn off neatly, and wrapped in tissue paper.

Nancy's eyes challenged her to speak of it later in the day when the girl came over for her daily visit.

"Your mother is a beautiful woman, Nancy. You don't know it," Mrs. Swan said simply.

"Yes, I do," the girl declared loyally. Then it occurred to her that Mrs. Swan might think she too considered the crocheted yoke beautiful. "Mother hasn't had as many opportunities as some people, but she wants to be refined."

"Oh, my dear, you don't know what you're talking about. Your mother is a regal woman. Instincts are what count. Your mother never could hurt people, or put them rudely in their place, or laugh at them unkindly. These are the tests of a gentle person. The acquiring of taste is something small compared with that.

"Beauty, you know, Nancy, is a matter of motive. A hideous hat may be beautiful if it makes the woman who wears it happy and gives her keen interest in life. Don't let yourself get narrow-minded about beauty. It can't be stereotyped and standardized. What may be ugly from one point of view may be sheer beauty from another."

Nancy loved her for that. It was so much dearer of



her than it would have been for her to pretend she thought the yoke was a lovely creation.

Mrs. Swan, Nancy thought, had most marvelous methods for gaining admiration.



## *Chapter Eighteen*

### LAWYERS AND LOVE LETTERS

#### I

WHENEVER Peter saw something he wanted to buy for Sally and the children, he confidently tucked it away in the future.

"When the invention is finished," he said, looking in furniture shop windows at mulberry-colored plush davenports, and floor lamps and tea wagons, "Sally can have all that truck she wants."

"When the invention comes out," he told himself, stopping timidly before windows of lingerie as dainty as magnolia trees in bloom, "Nancy can buy so many real linen things she won't know what to do with them."

When he looked covetously at a big, beautiful car, he quieted his own longing with "when the invention is sold." Of course, it might be only moderate good fortune that the washing machine would bring. But there was the delirious possibility that he would be a rich man, and could buy one of the palaces out at Chevy Chase, and have a chauffeur, and a personal maid for Sally, and a stable of horses for Eric. He amused himself, as he walked home from the night shift, with imaginary conversations between himself and his servants.

"How about the girl I saw you with in the car last Sunday morning, when you didn't know I was following you?" he'd ask, with a sly wink at James. James would understand him.

"Why, that was Mamie. I was takin' her to her sister's baby's christenin' mass," James would say. "I meant to ask you if I could use the car, but you were busy with your lawyer, and I didn't like to bother you."

"My stockbroker," he would correct. Lawyers meant trouble; stockbrokers prosperity.

"Your stockbroker? Well, we only took a little ride."

"Nice girl, Mamie?" Peter would question, as one man to another.

"Peach. Goina marry her when we get somethin' ahead," James would say boastfully.

"Don't need much, old man. I got married on eighteen dollars a week. 'Course times were easier then, but your thirty-five oughta do it easy if she's sensible. She looks sensible, too. Don't wait too long. You'll care more about each other if you have to stick together through a lot." Then he'd slip an extra check into James' pay envelope the next payday, marked whimsically, "Object: matrimony." Pretty good! A chauffeur was apt to be more careful if he had a wife and some responsibilities.

But usually Peter felt that he'd rather not have the washing machine bring in a vast fortune. That might bring unhappiness. In the movies, money always brought unhappiness, and in the last reel, when the old folks were on the verge of divorce, they had to give it

all away and go back to their little cottage to find themselves again. He'd rather just have a comfortable income from the washing machine—enough, say, to adopt a coupla boys and send 'em through school and teach 'em a good trade. Enough to buy himself a big farm some place and Sally and Nancy all the pretty, foolish things they liked.

"Either too much or not enough is uncomfortable. There must be a good in-between," he said.

He had engaged a patent attorney to search the records, and he expected to hear any day that his patent had been granted.

Then, he told Sally, sanguinely, it was just a question of selling the rights of the patent to a manufacturer. Or perhaps of going in with him on some sort of a proposition. It was better, though, to sell outright, Peter felt; then you didn't have to worry about the selling end of the finished product.

His attorney was a suave, greasy-haired little man, who intimidated Peter with long words and patronizing manner. Peter felt that his draughtsman charged too much for the blueprint he made. One of the draughtsmen in the Yard had offered to do it for nothing for Peter, but Mr. Simons, the patent attorney, declared it was necessary to have it done on the firm's paper. Peter didn't like to argue.

## 2

It was going to be a surprise to Sally. He expected to have an advance payment by Sally's birthday. He

planned to take her on a trip to Atlantic City for a celebration—the first vacation they had had together in all their lives!

"I want this all settled by October if possible," he told the attorney. While he was receiving Peter's payments for his services, the lawyer was unflaggingly encouraging.

"Indeed, I'm quite certain we'll have a tidy little check ready for you at that time," he said. His representative, he told Peter, was interviewing manufacturers in various parts of the country, trying to interest them in Peter's plans.

As the negotiations dragged along indefinitely, Peter's funds grew slimmer and slimmer. When he saw this, Mr. Simons began to lose his optimism. When Peter told him quite frankly that he had no more money to spend on the invention, Mr. Simons declared baldly that he doubted if a manufacturer could be located who might buy the rights.

"Of course, if you had the capital to manufacture it yourself," he said mercilessly, "it might be possible to swing this machine."

"But you know it's good. And you said you were sure you could find a man who would buy the manufacturing rights," Peter began.

"Well, my dear man, I'm no prognosticator. My agent has done all he possibly can, and if you have no more funds to finance his endeavors, I'm afraid we can't do any more for you." He placed the tips of his fingers together and lolled back in his leather cushioned chair. Peter dropped his hat on the floor and picked



it up. He couldn't get the hang of this thing. Mr. Simons had been so enthusiastic, and now he didn't seem to think much of the machine. He, himself, knew it was a good invention. It was all foolishness that they couldn't find somebody willing to make some money out of his brains. He didn't know what to do.

"Well, I'll think it over. Maybe I can get hold of a little more money," he stammered, pulling himself together. No Atlantic City for Sally! And poor little Mamie, who would never attend her sister's baby's christening mass in his automobile! He put on his hat and started towards the door.

"I'm a gambler, Mr. Lauren," Mr. Simons announced in his fat voice that oozed pleasantly around the black cigar always between his lips. "I'm a great gambler. I like to take chances. I amuse myself that way. How about selling this thing to me? We both know the chances are it will never amount to anything; but I'm sport enough to play with it a little longer. How about letting me have it for, say five hundred?" He looked out of his office window, apparently more interested in the street below than in this conversation.

"But I've already spent seven hundred on it, besides the work and everything," Peter said, flushing scarlet.

"Well, the chances are I'd have to spend another thousand before I discover that it is not marketable, so you see I'm probably letting myself in for a fifteen hundred loss." Mr. Simons smiled pleasantly.

"Well, I'll think it over and let you know to-morrow," Peter said.

"No hurry, I'm sure. There's nothing more we can do on it, anyway, just now," the attorney assured him.

Peter was jolly that night, singing funny songs and "carrying on" with the children until Sally made him stop, for fear they wouldn't sleep from the excitement. When he went down to fix the furnace for the night, he stayed so long that Sally went down to see what was the matter. She found him sitting on the chopping block, his head in his hands.

"What's the matter, Daddy? You scared me."

"Just kinda tired, Mother. I sat down and got to thinkin'. Ready for bed?"

### 3

Nancy belonged to a basketball team. Peter was proud of it, but Sally was afraid she would be hurt. Sally had never known exercise that extended over much space. Her own was intense, but was carried on in a relatively small spot—six square feet in the cellar at the washing machine, the top of the perilous stepladder when she papered the ceiling of her sewing room, where the roof had leaked during a bad storm. But she wouldn't tell Peter and Nancy that the basketball game worried her. They would laugh, and she was afraid they would make fond excuses to each other for her, behind her back. She couldn't have stood that. So she said nothing—bravely trying not to look relieved when Nancy came home intact after a game. Sally had never seen a basketball game. She thought it was a sort of Amazon football.

Just before Christmas, Caroline Reynolds, Nancy's "particular friend" at the moment, stopped at noon to remind Nancy to bring gym shoes for the game after school that afternoon.

Caroline, whose father was secretary to a Congressman, felt her condescension to Nancy keenly. But Nancy was so stimulating in her adoration that the older girl couldn't withstand it. Besides, the girls in Caroline's neighborhood snubbed her painfully. They were Congressmen's daughters. Caroline pretended she didn't like them.

Sally decided to paint the floor of Nancy's room as a surprise. She moved the little dimity-curtained dressing table she had made from a packing box, and the desk she had fashioned from an old commode, sandpapered and painted a soft ivory color.

As she was straining at the little desk, a book fell out and two letters fluttered to the floor. Sally picked them up to replace them, and a line caught her eye.

"My dear little Dream Girl."

Her heart turned over. Oh, no! Without considering a moment, she sat down on Nancy's little dressing table bench, and read the letter tremulously.

"My dear little Dream Girl: For that is what you are to me. Nothing else in my life seems to matter now that I have found you. I feel as though I had been living always for that moment two weeks ago when I met you. Can you possibly feel the same, dearest?"

"I know you are young—in years—but there is an ageless wisdom in your eyes. You must understand

what it means to love as I love you. I am ten years older than you, and that is old enough to look after you as you deserve to be cared for. Please meet me next Sunday at the same place, when you are supposed to be at church, and let us plan something. I shall live for that hour, my wonderful girl.

“Yours forever,

“Roy.”

The dainty little room whirled dizzily. Sally held onto the bench to keep from being flung off.

“What shall I do? My little Nancy—only fourteen! What shall I do?” she said to herself. She tried to remember last Sunday. Peter had gone with the children to Sunday school as usual. But two Sundays ago Nancy had gone early and alone, so she could arrange the flowers on the Superintendent’s desk. The girls in her class took turns arranging the flowers. The letter was dated November 17. That would about make it! Oh, Nancy! She might be planning something terrible, in her innocence, this very afternoon. Sally moved the furniture back into the old places, shakily. No painting this afternoon.

She decided not to say anything until she had talked with Peter. She wondered if it would cost too much to send Nancy away to boarding school for the next term. They had a few hundred dollars in the bank for Peter’s invention—or a frowning of fate.

At four o’clock when Nancy didn’t come home, she called Peter at the corner drugstore. She had telephoned to him only once before during ten years. But before he arrived, Nancy came in, singing as usual—

a little ragtime song, incongruous on her lips.

"Starved, darling!" she exclaimed to Sally, fluffing up her hair in the refrigerator mirror. "Got beat, darn it!"

Sally tried to be calm. She kept Peter from showing that he had been called home early.

"Daddy sick?" Nancy whispered anxiously to her mother, when she noticed it was barely five o'clock. "He looks sorta pale."

"No. He finished what he was doing, and there was no use starting a new piece so late in the day," Sally said. Peter had never come home early before since they were married.

"Well, imagine! I guess they must be getting human down at that old yard," Nancy commented loftily.

After dinner, Nancy went over to see Mrs. Swan, and Peter and Sally had a worried conference.

"I simply can't bear it, Daddy," Sally wept. "She is so adorable, and I have been so careful of her. He is probably a terrible person."

Peter was angry. He read the letter and said jumbled things under his breath. Peter didn't know how to swear.

"I'm afraid to scold her, Daddy—she is so sensitive. We might lose her confidence forever, and I couldn't bear that," Sally said tearfully. "Perhaps she will tell me herself to-morrow. It's Saturday, and she'll be with me all day. If she hasn't told me by to-morrow night, we must do something." Sally patted Peter's comforting hand absently.

"Let's take the money for your invention and send



her away to school for a term, until she gets over this," she said.

"Now, don't worry, Mother. I'll do something," he comforted her. A lot of troubles can sneak up on a fella all at once!



## *Chapter Nineteen*

### NANCY BESTS HER DADDY

#### 1

THE next noon Peter took a few minutes beyond his lunch hour to visit Mr. Simons.

"If you will give me seven hundred dollars—just what I've spent, I'll sell you the invention," he said wearily. Something in the homely, flushed face smote the heart of Mr. Simons. He felt magnanimous, for some curious reason.

"Tell you what I'll do, Lauren—I'll give you a thousand, and to-morrow I'll be trying to figure out what made me such a damn fool all of a sudden. I ought to lose money. Anyone should, who deliberately throws it away on something that looks as if it hadn't a ghost of a chance to come through."

Peter was too discouraged to defend his invention. But he knew in his heart that it did have a chance, because he knew it was good.

Mr. Simons had printed blanks on hand, releasing the inventor from any claim for his patent. He produced one magically from the top drawer of his desk and handed Peter his expensive fountain pen to fill out the dotted lines.

Mr. Simons gave him a green check, embellished with bold scribblings that meant a thousand dollars.

What was that about a mess of pottage? Peter folded the check neatly and put it in his bill fold. He deposited it in his bank before he went home. Sally and he were going to talk to Nancy that night. Nothing mattered much to-day except that.

## 2

Sally had been unsuccessful in her attempts to draw Nancy out on the subject of her love letters. They would both talk to her, after Eric was asleep.

When Nancy was in bed, Sally and Peter came in solemnly, looking rather frightened at this mysterious small daughter of theirs. They sat gingerly, one on each side of her narrow bed.

"Your mother and I have always trusted you, Nancy, but it seems you have deceived us," said Peter in a queer voice, clearing his throat, and fumbling with his fingers at Nancy's blue, puffy quilt.

"Why, Daddy—" Nancy began, looking alarmed.

"You're only a child, and your mother and I have had experience and we know about life, and you should come to us first when there is something that happens—"

"We are your best friends," Sally interposed with gentle haste.

"We have found these Roy letters." Here Peter's anger overcame him. "I tell you right now we're not goin' to have anything like that goin' on. Who is this soft-mouthed little whelp, anyway?" Here Sally reached over and tapped Peter with her cool hand.

"We have thought of you as our little girl, and here you have been letting things happen to you which we didn't know about. Mother wants you to have men friends, dear, when it is time, but we hadn't realized that you were having them now. And this Roy—" Sally pronounced his name gently; maybe it was beautiful to Nancy—"this Roy seems to be a grown man."

"Why, how—how—" Nancy stammered, flushing vividly.

"And I'll tell you something right now," sputtered Peter. "A fella like that don't mean any good to a youngster. He's probably laughing up his sleeve at you this minute. He'd get your confidence, and then leave you in the lurch and ruin your life—that's what a fella like him'd do."

But Nancy's lovely throat was lifted high, and she looked at her mother and father haughtily.

"Will you please tell me how you happen to know about—Roy?" she asked in her clear young voice.

"Why, I found his letters," Sally said simply.

"*And you read them?* You read letters that weren't written to you?" Her tone was unmercifully edged and scathing.

"My dear, I'm your mother."

"And so you are entitled to show me less respect than you would a stranger? There is no such thing as privacy in one's family, I suppose. I shall never forgive that," she said proudly.

"Look here! Your mother's got a right to read anything that has anything to do with you, and don't you forget it, Nancy Lauren," Peter broke in hotly. "Any-

way, that ain't the point. We want to know what's goin' on with this Roy fella, and how long it's been goin' on. That's the point."

"That may be one point, Father. Another is that I feel you and Mother owe me an apology. You assume I have done something wrong before you know anything about it." Nancy was enjoying herself now. Sally was abject before this surprising daughter's calm scorn.

"We're only askin', dear," she said humbly.

"Well, if you must know," Nancy said deliberately—she could not tell them the truth—"it's no longer going on, as you so vulgarly put it. It is all over. I may look like a child to you, but I know how to handle my affairs better than you seem to think. Roy is a wonderful man, and," she lowered her eyes a moment, "he cared for me deeply, but I realize he has no place in my life." She was superb, she felt.

"Where is he?" Peter asked falteringly. His face was pink. High and mighty little snip! He tried to control his flush.

"He has gone away," said Nancy, "to forget."

They left ingloriously, embarrassed and bewildered by her haughtiness. She allowed them to kiss her good night, and pretended not to notice the meek tears in Sally's eyes.

After they had gone, she pulled the covers over her head and wept. Well, it was their own fault she had told them a lie. They had credited her with a romance, and she couldn't admit that it didn't belong to her—especially when she envied Caroline so bitterly anyway.



She couldn't say, "Oh, no, I'm not a lovely romantic figure with a grown-up man in love with me. I am only a stupid, clumsy fourteen-year-old that nobody would look at, no matter how much I wish they would!" She couldn't say that; could she? She wept at the flatness of life; and with shame, not for the lie, but because it was a lie.

"Mother had no right to go poking in my desk like that," she said. That outrage she would save for to-morrow's grief. To-night she would take up the tragedy of not having a lover, when Caroline was so nonchalant about this splendid one of hers.

Caroline had said, "There's no privacy in my house. Mother knows George Taylor is mad about me, and is always watching for letters. Will you keep these of Roy's for me until I go to school next year?" Nancy's desk had been a hallowed place for a week because the rapturous things had lain within it. And now! She would never tell Caroline!

## 3

In the morning Sally brought Nancy her breakfast on a tray, with a little spray of everlasting flower in a bud vase. She embarrassed Nancy with her homage.

"You must forgive us, dear. We love you so, and we are so proud of you. Don't remember what your father said. He was just excited. He is so afraid something might happen to you, you see. But I know you can take care of yourself, darling. Only tell me about things, Nancy, because you're my only little girl,

and I want to know life with you." Sally was almost pleading in her manner. Nancy smiled graciously, and ate the French toast and chocolate. She never had breakfast in bed unless she were ill, of course. The world pays a certain tribute to the loved women!

Peter was jovial while everybody was getting ready for church. He sang comic songs while he shaved, and offered Nancy the funny paper before he looked at it himself. Eric was bewildered.

When Nancy was all dressed and waiting for the others in the living room, Peter came in shyly and kissed her.

"My big girl! You're awfully sweet to-day," he said. Imagine! A compliment from Father! "Don't think anything about last night. Mother was sorta excited. She can't get it through her head that you're not a baby any more. I told her you'd probably got it all fixed up anyway, but she made us go in and talk it over. 'Course she hasta sorta look after you, you know, because there's a lot of things a girl don't know about, but she gets kinda worried about nothin' sometimes. You mustn't hold it against her, will you?" he said.

Nancy said she wouldn't.

If there was a dull ache in Peter's mind that Sunday, no one suspected it. It was hard for him to get used to the thought that his wonderful invention had been a failure. He couldn't believe it. Now that this danger to Nancy was disposed of, he regretted the sale he had made in haste. But still, he could never have told Sally that he had spent their money on something that other men thought was worthless. And suppose there

had been a need for the money in the bank. . . .

Yes, he was glad he'd got rid of it. Lucky to get a thousand dollars from Mr. Simons. Probably the older man was sorry for him. Peter felt humiliated that he had been pitiable enough in another's eyes to make him spend his money for something that had no value. Well, it was a business proposition: every man had to look out for himself. No use thinking of it any more. No use making silly plans for the future, and what he'd do for Sally and the children when he got the fortune. Just like a kid, planning on a crazy thing like that!



## *Chapter Twenty*

### FLIRTING WITH FAME

#### I

IN the early spring Emily Swan won her case.

"So now I can be on my way again," she said joyously to Sally, when she told her. "I've been in this little house so long, I'm all potbound. I have wanted to rush away to London, or Vienna or Paris and buy myself a beautiful year. But I was afraid to spend my little bit of money, for fear I'd never be getting any more. I'd hate not having enough to grow old gracefully."

"Are you going right away?" Sally asked regretfully.

"I wish I could to-night. Of course I hate to leave you-all. We've had a right happy time together, I think."

Nancy was desolated at the thought of losing her beautiful, grown-up playmate.

"Never mind, dearest, we'll have a wonderful date together as soon as you're grown up enough to go away from home for a little while. When you're nineteen, and I'm seventy-six, or however old I'll be by that time, remember that we have an engagement to run away together and see the beautiful world. We'll travel by yacht, and train, and donkey and canoe, and

on foot; we'll be millionaire ladies, and lady hoboos and Cook travelers, and have one hundred and three adventures together. Will you like that?" Emily asked.

"Yes," Nancy replied dreamily. Then in the unexpectedly practical way that came from Peter she said, "but I've got to be a teacher, and I'll be going to Normal School by that time."

"Don't tell anyone, but I have a strong conviction that you'll never go to Normal School, darling," Emily said.

"Do you think so?" Nancy asked hopefully.

"Of course I do, dear. You don't want to be a teacher? Well, then, when the time comes, you mustn't be polite about it. Just speak up and tell Daddy and Mother what it is you want to do. That's the way to be happy. Know what you want, and then get it."

"But I don't know exactly. I have a feeling that I want to do something that would take me away to see the beautiful things in the world. If I could paint, or could sing, or something. . . . Is the bluest bay in the world under a mountain somewhere in Italy? Will we go to see it sometime?" she asked suddenly.

"We shall. And the greenest river in Africa, and perhaps an amethyst desert," Emily promised.

Peter was relieved that Emily was taking herself out of the immediate landscape. He had never overcome his uncomfortable, guilty feeling that Sally was being nice to the other woman to show him in some subtle way that she trusted him and forgave him for whatever had happened. Only, of course, Sally didn't know.



Unless she had been able to read his queer, uncontrollable fascination in his carefully guarded eyes. He wondered if sometime, when Sally was a neat little old lady, he could tell her about it. The feeling that he and Sally had built up a little tissue-paper wall of misunderstanding because of that month of absence troubled him frequently.

"Will you be good enough to keep my tea wagon for me until sometime when I can use it again?" Emily said to Sally, when they were crating her furniture to send to a little house in the Berkshires, which was part of her husband's bequest. "I sha'n't want it there, and I'd be so much obliged to you for keeping it." She knew Sally would not want to accept it as a gift; she suspected, too, Sally's quaint fondness for tea wagons. The candlesticks of wrought iron, and many other little pieces of furniture, Sally "kept" also. She still expected Mrs. Swan to send for them sometime, after years passed. She used to burnish the treasured furniture every Saturday and guard it from too intimate contact with the ruthless world, because her friend had trusted her with it. She enjoyed it really more, because she felt she would some day return it to Mrs. Swan.

## 2

Nancy and Eric were in High School now, and Sally felt they should have a nice home in which to entertain their friends. Of course, Second Street was a respectable neighborhood, but Sally didn't want Nancy

and Eric to make lasting friends on the street.

"Of course, they're dear, good people, Peter, and I'm not snobbish, but you know as well as I that we must be careful not to have them the only kind the children know. I wouldn't want Nancy to marry someone from here, or Eric either," she said.

Peter knew what she meant. They were good, hard-working folks, but they didn't have ambitions for themselves, like Sally and himself. He knew what she meant, but it didn't sound just right when you put it into words.

They found a broad, white frame house with two elm trees in the front lawn. It had a wide, pillared piazza, and eight rooms. The front door was in the center of the house, with a large room on either side. Sally thought that elegant—to come in and see rooms to the right and to the left of you. Quite a mansion!

"The elms on the lawn give it such distinction," she said many times while they were contemplating making the purchase, and Peter had to remind her practically that it wasn't trees they were buying, but a house.

Of course, they had to take it on the Building Association plan, but that held no terrors for them now. They had paid for one house; they could pay for another and hardly notice it.

"If you'd only hurry up and finish your old invention, Slowpoke, we might be able to buy it straight off," Sally said. But she laughed. She had always considered the invention something of a joke. Peter knew she wasn't really planning on anything ever happening from it.

## 3

Sally tried not to be jealous of Nancy's letters to Mrs. Swan, but they were so frequent and bulky she grew to regret them. She knew it was much easier to put things on paper than to say them and she was desperately afraid that Nancy would sometime feel that Mrs. Swan understood her better than her own mother did.

Nancy used to kneel on the floor beside the bed in her little room, writing page after page. She was always starting a letter, it seemed to Sally, or continuing one that she carried around in a book. Mrs. Swan took the place of a diary in the young girl's life. Nancy never offered to let Sally read one of these outpourings; and Sally would have died rather than ask her.

"Nancy is such a rare child," Mrs. Swan wrote to Sally, "we must make something splendid out of her, mustn't we? I know you are proud of the charming sketch of the little schoolhouse. I showed it to a writer friend of mine, and he assured me that Nancy has great promise. I am so proud of her, too. Don't think me presumptuous for being proud—please let me be."

It hurt Sally cruelly because she didn't know about the schoolhouse sketch. She gave Nancy a dozen opportunities to tell her about it, but the child seemed too shy.

"Mother is so proud of you, dear. She knows you are going to do big things in the world," she said gently. But she could not break through Nancy's re-

serve. She consoled her jealousy of Emily Swan by saying that Nancy revealed more of herself to the other woman merely because she didn't see her.

"It's like tellin' your secrets to God. If you had to see him every day, and eat dinner with him, and have him see you in your underwear, you wouldn't tell him," she told herself.

## 4

Something marvelous happened to Sally. She had been mending Eric's stockings in the "drawing room" window, while Nancy practiced her music lesson. She loved to listen to Nancy, and to steal furtive glances at this radiant child of hers, as she nodded her head in time to her precise playing. Sally thought she played very well, considering the fact that she hadn't started to take lessons until she was twelve. In the 1912's children started to play when they were six, but the Laurens hadn't been able to afford a piano until six years later.

Suddenly Nancy turned on the piano stool and said, "Mother, I've written a story. I wonder if there's some way I could have it typewritten, so I could send it to a magazine?"

Sally's heart stopped beating from joy. But she took another stitch without looking up.

"I expect so," she said quietly. "What kind of a story, dear?"

"Oh, an old-fashioned story about the Civil War. I've been working on it for a long time, and it's finished

now. Would—would you like to see it?" She was shy about it. Sally didn't look at her, sitting with her slender ankles pressed tightly together and her long hands clasped rigidly in her lap.

"Of course I would, dear. I'm so glad. You know, I always hoped you'd want to write."

"Did you really? Why, I was sure you'd think it was rather silly. Don't tell Father, or Eric. Promise me!" Nancy's eyes were pleadingly earnest.

"No, dear—just you and me."

Sally thought it the most beautiful story she had ever heard. Nancy read it in a nervous, hurried little voice, caressing the sentences she particularly loved.

"I think that's nice in there, Mother, don't you?" she asked every once in a while.

"Oh, lovely," Sally breathed.

When Nancy finished reading, there were tears in Sally's eyes. The lovely heroine died at the end. Nancy was immensely gratified that her mother could see the beauty of the sad end. She was glad she had read it to her.

"We must get it typewritten somehow," Sally said. They had never heard of a public stenographer. Sally thought that people who wanted typewriting done, did it themselves, just as they did their washing, or their shampooing, or their dressmaking.

"I'll think of some way of doing it, Lovey. You trust Mother," she said.

Jerry Kelly had a dilapidated typewriter, Sally knew, because his mother had advertised it for sale one time when Jerry needed some money for a taxi to take



a girl to a dance. Two people had come to look at it, but it was such an antiquated style that they made excuses and left without buying it. She went back to Second Street to see Mrs. Kelly that afternoon.

"I wonder if Jerry would rent me his typewriter for a few weeks? I have something I want to copy for a friend of mine," she said.

"Go on! Jerry'll be tickled to have you use it for nothin'. What're you goina write? I didn't know you could typewrite. I must say, there are a lot of things you know how to do, Mrs. Lauren."

"Well, I'm not much of a typist, I'm sure," Sally said modestly.

When she attempted to use the machine, she found she was even less of a typist than she had hoped. The letters registered in a mysterious, hidden way. You rolled the paper in and wrote a line, and when you turned the roller up to see how it had come out, a dozen surprises awaited you. In the first place, it was next to impossible to judge where the line would be located on the paper. And then the letters had a way of sitting on each other's lap unexpectedly, or quarreling and leaving great, ridiculous emptinesses in a word. It required keen imagination to read the result.

Sally kept the typewriter in a big hatbox in her closet, so Peter wouldn't ask about it. She practiced feverishly every afternoon for a week. She seemed to show no improvement at the end of the time. Then, dressing in her best street clothes, she visited Camden's Commercial College. It was a pretentious looking building from the outside, but when one

mounted three flights of dusty, bleak stairs, one found only two moth-eaten teachers, five rickety typewriters, almost as old as Jerry's, and a dozen pupils.

In a section of the cloakroom, partitioned off and marked "Office", Sally found President Camden, a stout old man, with dirty hands, who wore a Prince Albert coat. Sally sat timidly on a dusty gilt chair, behind the coat rack, and explained the purpose of her call.

"I want to learn a little about typewriting, but I haven't any money to spend. So I thought—"

"We accept a small deposit and the balance in payments when you secure your position," Professor Camden said patiently.

"Well, you see, I wasn't thinking of taking a position, exactly, at least not right away. But I wondered if—"

Here a shadow appeared against the ground glass door, and a thin, middle-aged woman stuck her head into the office and said, "Freddy, that half-wit ain't showed up for two days, and they're askin' for their corrected papers. What'll I say?" The perturbed silhouette didn't notice Sally sitting behind the coat hanger.

"I'm busy, Miss Phelps," Professor Camden said irritably. "Don't stand out there, shouting the business through the hall."

"Beg your pardon," Miss Phelps mumbled, becoming aware of Sally. "Professor Camden, the corrector hasn't been here, and the papers have accumulated. The students need some of their work returned," she said again, in a different, mincing voice.

"Well, I'll adjust that later, Miss Phelps," the principal said ponderously. Miss Phelps shrugged her shoulders and withdrew.

"I wondered if there wasn't some little service I could perform for you that would pay for my lessons. I don't want to become a real typist, of course—just enough to do some copying for myself," Sally began explaining again.

"No, we'd have to have cash—at least a deposit," Professor Camden said firmly. "Couldn't you make a ten dollar deposit, and then see what else we could do about the rest of the tuition?" he asked hopefully.

Sally flushed. "I'm afraid I couldn't. Well, I'm sorry I took up your time," she said getting up to go.

"Not even ten dollars, Madam?" He scowled and raised his shaggy eyebrows in amazement. When it was evident that she was going to leave, he relented.

"Well, my assistant says our young woman who corrects the typewriting lessons is absent. She is working her way through college, making the usual deposit, of course. If you'd like to take her place, correcting papers until she returns, we'll give you instructions, during that time," he offered reluctantly. "It may be only a day or two, of course. Anyone can correct the papers. Would you care to make that arrangement?"

"That would be fine," Sally said, smiling with relief.

5

Half an hour after the children were in school the

next morning, Sally was on her way to Camden's Commercial College, her house in spotless order, the dinner shopping done, and the potatoes and carrots pared and standing in cold water to be put on the stove as soon as she returned in the afternoon. She told no one where she was going. She felt young and happy, going down on the street car with a secret in her proper little head.

Professor Camden and Miss Phelps each had a drawerful of papers ready for her when she arrived. She worked until one-thirty on them, and then, head-achy and dizzy from excitement, hurried out to a soda fountain for a chocolate milk shake. When she returned, hurrying up the three flights of stairs, Miss Phelps said she'd better typewrite for a couple of hours, and then do a little more correcting before she went home. The typewriter teacher was delighted to have her use the invisible model, because other machines were scarce, and she grudged Sally's place at a better one.

At four o'clock Sally left, arriving home just in time to get into her bungalow apron and arrange the table before Peter came home. All night she dreamed of rows and rows of nonsensical words to be gone over in search of errors. The students were sly. When they made a mistake, they didn't erase or strike over it: they went blithely on, hoping it would not be noticed. They had to finish two books of exercises before Camden's would give them a letter to an employment agency. They needed that letter desperately, most of them. Sally felt sorry when she had to put

a ring around a mistake with her blue pencil. It meant that they would have to copy the whole page again, perfectly. Professor Camden instructed Sally that she was supposed to find mistakes on a certain percentage of each student's work. Camden's, of course, wanted to keep them doing exercises as long as possible. Once out of the Commercial College, they seldom came back.

"Ours is like the undertaking business," Professor Camden said. "We can only count on serving each customer once."

Sally went downtown every day for almost two weeks, and then it was the first of the month, and Peter changed from the day to the night shift. It was just as well, anyway. One of the neighbors said inquiringly, "My you're gettin' to be a regular little gadabout, aren't you? Been out almost every day this week, haven't you?"

## 6

Now she had from four o'clock until midnight to work on Nancy's story. She pecked and erased and re-copied untiringly for two weeks, and then it was finished—a neat little pile of manuscript, surprisingly professional looking, she and Nancy thought.

They sent it to a magazine, with a dignified little letter, and then waited breathlessly for a reply. Nancy had fabulous plans for the way she'd spend the money she might receive, but Sally was concerned only with the ecstasy of having Peter see his daughter's name in print.



"They'll want her picture, probably, to go in the front of the magazine," she thought. She made Nancy a yellow organdie dress with a fischu collar, because she thought it would make a sweet picture. Just head and shoulders, with one girlish curl peeping over her shoulder. She could see it already on the front page of the magazine, where they told about contributors.

"Miss Lauren is a young author of tremendous promise. Her mother has educated her from babyhood for authorship," the little write-up would say—or something like that.

But by the time the story came back, with a courteous, impersonal letter from the editor's secretary, Nancy was so excited about Mrs. Swan's invitation for the summer that she scarcely seemed to notice.

"Oh, well," Nancy said cheerfully, "I think now it was kind of silly in spots. And besides, my teacher says that magazines have trained writers do all their stories for them."

But Sally pressed out the slightly contaminated sheets with a warm iron and put the story gently back into its envelope. She felt as though she were handling a precious little dead body.

"I must keep it. Some day they'll value it highly, and I must put it away until then," she said to herself, wrapping it up in tissue paper and putting it in her bureau drawer under her best underwear.

## 7

"I never hear you sayin' anything about your invention any more, Daddy. What's become of it?" Sally

asked, from the depths of the evening paper, while they were sitting on the front piazza after dinner. "You better get at it if you expect to make anything of it. I see here's another man put a washing machine on the market and made a half a million dollars," she said, chewing her after-dinner gum. Sally had indigestion now, and unladylike as she felt it to be, gum-chewing seemed to relieve her.

"Yeh?" Peter said, controlling his voice, and not looking up from the paper. "What kinda machine?"

"I'll hand the paper over to you in a minute. I see that Mrs. Jarvis got life imprisonment for killin' her husband. Poor woman!"

So it had made good! His invention, that he had worked on nights in the Second Street house cellar, and dreamed over when things were going hard—going without hot coffee with his lunch when the Building Association payments seemed hard to meet, and being cheerful about it because some day the invention was going to pay everything back. Well . . . Sally handed over the paper and yawned.

Sure enough—it was Simons' picture, suave and smiling below the greasy hair. He had named it after himself, the "Simonswasher." That was hard to bear—like hearing a child of yours called by another's name. Peter felt that was more of an outrage than losing the money. The brisk newspaper account merely stated that in the last year Simons had made a half million dollars by relieving washwoman's cramp throughout the nation. The newspaper tried to be funny about it. The words blurred.

"Guess I'll walk around and see what's goin' on," Peter said vaguely, leaving the porch. Sally was engrossed in the evening short story on the magazine page.

He walked around to the back yard and sat on the lowest step of the back porch, staring up at the budding trees that made a patterned scrawl against the sky. Well, a man wanted things . . . and things; but he had to make a choice between them, sometimes. He had not wanted Sally upset about Nancy and the money he had spent on his invention, so he had sold it. He must be a good sport about it now. He had wanted Sally's peace of mind more than he had wanted the visionary fortune, at the time. He had made his own choice, and there was nothing to be said. Sally was happy. She would never know about the mistake he had made. It would only upset her, and she would lose the peace of mind he had purchased so dearly. She would want him to see a lawyer and try to get back his rights. They would all be upset and discontented, comparing their humble comfort with the suave Simons' half million.

He got up slowly and went upstairs. He unlocked the mahogany box wherein lay his gleaming mechanical drawing tools on purple velvet. The patent release, filled out in his round handwriting, was slipped under the purple velvet. He read it over, a little smile on his lips. Then he carried it downstairs and touched a match to it in the living room fireplace.

So that was that.



*Chapter Twenty-one*  
OF MODES AND MANNERS

1

IT seemed to Sally afterwards that when Nancy went to spend the summer with Emily Swan at her island home in Maine, she never came back. A beautiful girl, with broad "a's" in her voice and a sweet tolerance of the little old life, came back to the Lauren household, but it wasn't Nancy. Sally was somehow afraid of this new creature—afraid and yet desperately admiring.

"Nancy's so awfully refined, Peter," Sally would say. "We must remember how sensitive she is and not turn her against us in little ways, without knowing it."

"You'll put notions in her head. All a lot of foolishness, this makin' out Nancy's different from other people, just because she's goin' to write stories or something," Peter grumbled. "Nancy's no different to me. Maybe a little grewed up, and kinda proper, but the same old youngster, 'sfar as I can see."

But in his heart he knew she wasn't. It startled him a little, but he refused to acknowledge any difference. It was a real defeat for him, however, when he finally withdrew his objections to sending her to college.

"Normal School's the place for a girl with Nancy's brains. Only have to work till three o'clock in the afternoon, and nine months outa the year. What's this college business goina do for her, anyway?" he asked truculently. But he gave in, because everyone seemed to take it for granted that he would.

There was money enough, all right, he said irritably, when Nancy asked hesitatingly if that were his objection. Since he'd been doing the special war work at the Navy Yard on the Naval guns, there was money enough on hand to do what they wanted to.

Peter worked hard these days, and he earned whatever they paid him. The work was maddeningly particular, and although Peter was proud of the confidence the master mechanic placed in him, he began to grow nervous under the strain. Sometimes he felt like being grouchy when he came home to dinner after a long day of testing sights for infinitesimal inaccuracies. But he tried with pathetic patience never to give in to his nervousness. Sally remembered the china dog Magnold had shown her, with the painted, patient eyes and the wrinkled tail. She tried to be considerate and keep Peter serene, but she found herself often launching out on a long dissertation—such as how provoking it was when a patent can opener you buy for a quarter refuses to work.

Peter bought a piano player for Sally, and a second-hand car—the first legitimate toy he had had in his life. He spent every Sunday morning tinkering with the engine and making invisible improvements, and emerged from under the hood at noon enthusiastic



about a trip to the country. Sally privately felt that it was the car that kept Peter sane during those nerve-racking months.

Eric was "learning the trade" now at the Yard, and was immensely proud of Peter.

"Y'oughta see how those guys feel about Dad," he told Sally. "Lot of Bohunks and Polacks down there. Can't talk a word o' English, but they follow him around like dogs, waitin' to do somethin' for him. Somethin' about Dad, Mother, we never noticed around here, I guess. I don't know what it is, but Dad's one of those guys can make people work for him and like him, without sayin' a word." Eric's deference to his father about the house was touching.

"Y'know those sights Dad works on? If he made a mistake on one o' them, it'd cost the government \$19,000. Sometimes he does three a day. That's responsibility for you, all right," he said, awesomely. He bought tools for gifts to Peter from his meager wages, and wouldn't let him do any of the household repair work. He was forever scolding his mother and sister for conversation that might worry Dad, and being stern if they asked Peter to do anything for them.

"Here, let the cheap help fix that window," he'd say roughly, elbowing Peter aside. "No kinduva job for a sight expert!"

Peter never mentioned his work at home, except to say, rarely, that he was sorta tired, and guessed he wouldn't read to-night. He was afraid of becoming irritable around his home, and made a special effort to sing loudly whenever he was in the house. But often

his voice had a flat uncertainty in its cheerfulness.

## 2

Nancy criticized Peter's table manners. He'd always been careful of the children's manners while they were growing up, but he couldn't seem to remember about it now.

"*Daddy*, your fork!" Nancy would cry reprovingly, when he grasped his fork like a hoe and speared his meat with it wearily. "And for mercy's sake, don't leave your spoon in your coffee, dear."

Peter would make a half-hearted joke of it, but by the next meal he had forgotten again. He began to wonder whether he had changed, or whether Nancy was just noticing how crude he was. It didn't seem possible a man's good habits could collapse all of a sudden. He must have been bad always, he guessed. He couldn't remember, though, that his table manners had bothered him before. Table manners, he had thought, were something you corrected the children about, but which sort of took care of themselves in adults.

"Don't let's bother him, dear. He's just careless now because he's workin' so hard," Sally used to say gently to Nancy. "Don't let's pay any attention to him, and as soon as things get back the way they were before the war, he'll be like he used to."

"I know, Mother, but there's no excuse. Why, table manners are something you just take for granted in people," Nancy said firmly.

"But Daddy's so good, dear, and so patient and hard working. Somehow these seem such little things to scold him about," Sally defended.

"Well, that's just it. Daddy's such a thoroughbred at heart, I can't bear him to fall down on the simple little essential standards. Don't you see? I think Daddy is so splendid, I couldn't bear to have anyone misjudge him."

Sally saw. But it touched her deeply to see Peter's ineffectual attempts to remember to chew his food slowly, and not to talk while he was chewing. Eric was furious with Nancy for her scolding.

"You oughta be ashamed of yourself! I suppose you learned all these airs upta Mrs. Swan's? Well, let me tell you somepin', young lady. Your Dad's got more brains, and real refinement, too, than all that bunch of manicured he-birds of Mrs. Swan's put together," Eric said wrathfully.

"It's such a little thing. If it makes so much difference to Nancy, I oughta be able to remember," Peter used to tell himself. "I know how to handle a lotta instruments finer than a fork. Little thing like that oughtn't to bother me much." But the first thing he'd know, he'd notice Nancy being very quiet at the table, and looking at him reproachfully.

"Want the old man to take his meals in the kitchen hereafter, Honey?" he'd say, and try to laugh. "Mother, I guess you'll have to give me my dinner on the kitchen table so I won't disgust the stylish young lady."

"How *can* you, Nancy?" Sally would exclaim afterwards. "It hurts his feelings so much to have you ashamed of him."

"Nothing of the sort, Mother! He's just stubborn because we've talked about it. He could get over it easily if he wanted to. I think he just likes to hurt me," Nancy declared.

Sally was torn between loyalty to both of them. They were both so right!

"If you really love someone, you don't notice little things like that about them, dear. Daddy is so wonderful. Things like that don't seem to be disgusting in him, and you know I hate them in anyone else."

"That's just weakness, Mother. You know perfectly well I love him as much as you do. Yes, I do! But that's no reason I have to accept everything he does. He'd have a lot more respect for you if you stood up for what you believe once in a while. You've always given in to everything he wanted, even to letting him select your hats," Nancy said disdainfully.

"But I tell you those things don't matter. They are too little to make him unhappy over. It would be like refusing to take a trip to Europe because your steamer ticket was pink instead of green."

## 3

Letters came often from a boy Nancy had met at Mrs. Swan's that summer.

"What's his name?" Sally asked timidly, when Nancy volunteered no information about her new friend.

"Stanley Sterne. He's a Harvard man, and he's going to be the owner of a big leather business some day," Nancy said airily.

Sally liked that. This was the sort of boy she had in mind, when she moved her children away from the danger of marrying into one of the good-hearted railroad men's families. She bragged a little, with casual ease, to Mrs. Kelly, about Nancy's young man from Harvard.

But she wanted to be sure that the frequent letters weren't too ardent. Nancy was young, yet, and that sort of thing was dangerous, she felt, shrewdly.

"Why don't you read me Mr. Sterne's letter, dear?" she suggested. "I always wanted to know a man from Harvard myself."

"Well, I'll leave it on your dresser. You can read it if you want to," Nancy said indifferently.

It was safe enough, Sally felt, after she had waded through eight closely written pages about his studies in Music Theory. The letter might have been copied from his study notebook. But the conclusion gratified her completely. Here was a silent ally of hers, whom she might depend upon to help keep Nancy on the road to fame.

"I get disgusted with the low brows around here, thinking about nothing but girls and booze parties. I have no intellectual companionship, such as we used to have when we went canoeing. I want to make myself worthy to be your friend, Nancy, so you won't be ashamed of me when you are famous," Mr. Sterne said.

Imagine! Intellectual companionship in a canoe! Sally hoped he didn't wear goggle glasses and mince his words. She liked men to be good, and serious, of course—but not too serious!





## *Chapter Twenty-two*

### HAPPIEST WOMAN

#### I

SOON after Nancy started to study at George Washington University, Mrs. Swan wrote that she had enlisted in "Y" work and was sailing with her unit in three weeks.

"Please let me come and see you dear people," she said. "I am so mixed up in my mind that I need your soothing influence for a day or so before I go."

Sally was delighted. It had been years since she had seen her friend, and she wanted her to know "how much nicer they had things" than when the children were small, on Second Street. She wondered if Emily Swan would be much changed by all her money and her happy, idle life. Nancy, of course, said she was just the same.

As she was bustling about her bright kitchen, getting dinner, while Peter and Nancy had gone in the car to meet Emily at the Union Station, Sally wondered whether or not Emily would find much difference in her. She knew she was a little stouter. Her old wine colored suit wouldn't fit her when she tried it on before making it over. She felt she had grown mentally since she had last seen Mrs. Swan. She was the president of the Mothers' Club, and the vice president of

the Parent-Teacher's Association. She had gone with three other home-makers before the City Commissioners to protest against a dance hall that was being built in the neighborhood. The newspapers had spoken of it. She was still an influence for progress, she felt happily.

Of course, she couldn't go overseas and open a canteen the way Mrs. Swan was going to, but she was looking after a man upon whom the government placed \$19,000's worth of responsibility three times a day. That certainly was something not to be spoken of lightly.

She opened the oven and peeped inside at the peach cobbler. It was a gorgeous pinky-brown on the top. Sliced fresh peaches were ready in a jonquil colored crock. Seven years ago Mrs. Swan had complimented her on her peach cobbler.

## 2

Emily Swan had not changed much. There was a fantastic white strand of hair plaited into her dark braid that gave her almost a festive look, as though she had woven in a ribbon for a party. Her eyes had their old look of subdued hilarity, and her voice the old tantalizing tenderness about it. She was stunning in her severe "Y" uniform.

"Well, well! How's it feel to be a soldier?" Peter asked jovially, as he helped her into the touring car and put her black leather bag into the front seat with himself. No use letting her think he was upset by

any memory of a mad day on the canal, and red wild-grape leaves, and blue smoke in the air, like music!

"It's awfully exciting, but I'm right tired now. I want to forget I've got something ahead of me that needs my nerve. I want to play with you-all that we're still living on Second Street, and that seven years haven't gone by."

"Is it seven years? I swear!" said Peter, wheeling his car around expertly in the street and darting between two larger cars. "I guess it is, all right, though, 'cause Nancy's grown up, and she used to be my little youngster. That's all that's different, though, isn't it?" said Peter. "You look about the same—unless you've grown a little taller?" He was trying to pay her a compliment!

"You're adorable in your uniform, Emily," whispered Nancy. She had been calling her Emily since she went to visit her. "You're like a beautiful Liberty Loan poster—Joan of Arc in a Y uniform! Such a consecrated look in your eyes, darling!"

Emily laughed happily. "I wish you were going with me, Nan. You make me feel so wonderful always. I know I should never be a coward with you near. The government should give you a special commission—head of the Bravery Department, or something!"

Sally met them at the door, with her little company giggle. "Oh, I'm so glad you could come," she laughed, kissing Emily and patting her tailored shoulder. The same funny geranium-like perfume!

"I've put you in Nancy's room. We have a big

guest bedroom, but Nancy insists you'd rather have the other twin bed in her room," she said, leading the way upstairs. "She'll probably keep you awake all night, and you need rest."

"I'm not sure it's rest I need so much as I need Nancy, and you-all," Mrs. Swan declared. "What a darling room!" she cried, standing on the threshold, looking at Nancy's yellow gingham curtains, and the China-blue rag rugs, the yellow wicker furniture with the little blue cushions. Sally beamed with pride. Emily had always made her feel clever.

She thought of their friendship as she "took up" dinner. She remembered that troubled first call she had made on Mrs. Swan, in order to find out whether or not she and Peter had got into mischief while she was away. She had gone, she remembered, principally to keep the neighbors from talking. And out of it had come this beautiful friendship. It was like the oyster making his pearl out of something that hurt him. Maybe Nancy could make a poem out of that thought. . . .

### 3

While Nancy was washing the dishes and Peter was splitting logs in the cellar for the evening's open fire, Sally read Emily the two letters she had received from Eric, since he went to Camp. She wanted to ask her advice about something that was troubling her.

"You know more about it than most people. Tell me, is there much danger of Eric getting in with the

wrong kind of girls while he is away? He doesn't know much about women, I'm afraid, and I'm so worried for fear he'll get acquainted with some rough men who'll lead him down the wrong path. I read a pamphlet last week about what the government is doing to stamp out the—bad sickness. Do you think there's much of that?" she asked, greatly embarrassed. "It said all the boys were examined after they went out to the camp. I'm so worried about Eric if that sort of thing is going on, because he don't know much about that sort of thing. What'd I better do?" She twisted a tassel on her black satin gown.

"I shouldn't worry about it, dear. He's yours and Peter's son, and that makes a big difference, you know," Emily said. "His instincts are good, because they were made from yours and Peter's. That's what really counts, you know."

Peter built a log fire in the living room fireplace, and the four of them sat around it in the twilight, talking a little, and letting pauses of friendly silence bind them closer. After a time, Nancy went over to the piano and began to play Chopin.

These queer, tuneless, restless things Nancy liked usually bothered Peter. "Such music don't keep its feet on the ground, and there's nothin' you can get hold of, like the things that have a tune to 'em," he often said to himself.

But to-night, with the firelight like a halo about Emily Swan's dark braids with the impudent white woven through, he felt mysterious power in the music. Something like the things she had said to him that



day—moments that are somehow more real than other times, because of some inexplicable glamor about them. . . .

"I have another picture to hang in my gallery," Emily said softly, looking straight at Peter. His hands opened and closed.

"My, it's lovely to have a picture gallery," Sally sighed.

## 4

Mrs. Swan's clothes were all tailor-made. Even her underwear and nightgowns were straight linen garments with virginal strips of hemstitching and pin tucks for ornamentation. Only her negligee was mufti—a frivolous chiffon thing of the rhododendron orange she wore so vividly. At night she and Nancy sat in their room until the house and all the street was quiet, reading aloud and talking in their fond, restless way.

Sitting cross-legged on their twin beds, they read Rosetti and Walt Whitman, the new war plays of Barrie, Amy Lowell, and the restless Russians. Nancy, radiant-haired, wearing a powder-blue bathrobe, and Emily like a slim pyramid of flame. Two nights they heard the milk wagons rattling down the street before they went to bed, exhilarated by their perilous diet of words.

"I feel just as I used to when I was nineteen, and Mother let me visit some girl I knew. Only I never knew one as satisfactory as you, Nan," Emily said once,

when she and Nancy were having a late breakfast on Sally's vine-screened back porch. Sally loved to humor these two—her "girls."

She felt wistfully that she might cajole Mrs. Swan into returning part of the lost Nancy if she were sweet enough about it. She tried several times to be included in their little reading parties, but there seemed to be some password that she didn't know how to speak. She came to Nancy's room, wearing her purple kimona with the awkward sleeves that were too short because the material had given out, and attempted to enter into the conversation. Both the "girls" seemed to be waiting, politely, until she went back to her own room. They kept talking about the house and recipes, and about neighbors on Second Street, making courteous conversation until the guest should take her departure. She felt them keying down their conversation, kindly, so as not to make her feel the alien she was.

"Why don't you go on reading, dear? I'd like to hear it too," said Sally shyly.

"We're half way through now, and anyway I don't think you'd like it, Mother; we'll just talk," Nancy said, putting her arm around her mother affectionately. Sally felt like crying.

"Well, next time you're starting something, let me know, so I can come in and hear it too," she said wistfully.

"Well, what would you like us to read, dear?" Nancy asked indulgently. Sally was afraid to say. She tried so hard to like the right things, only they always seemed so stupid to her—or not quite nice—

about a man who had a mistress, or something like that.

"Well, just whatever you're reading will interest me," she said lamely.

But they did not invite her. She never asked again.

"They're like a coupla kids, those two," Peter said with amusement. "Mrs. Swan'll never be a real, middle-aged woman if she lives to be a hundred, I guess. She must be as old as you, but you'd think she was your daughter to look at her and hear her talk to Nancy." Dear, blunt Peter!

"Yes, I suppose so," Sally said quietly. But she felt no bitterness towards Emily. You see, she loved her too.

## 5

"Don't expect Mother to have any sympathy for them," Nancy laughed, patting Sally's hand playfully. They were having tea with Emily at a downtown tea room after a matinee, and beginning to discuss the play.

It had been a wonderful afternoon for Sally, wearing her heliotrope silk dress and white silk gloves, and a lovely corsage of violets which Emily had insisted on buying, "to match her eyes." They had sat "downstairs" at the play, and now they were having tea at this smart shop, where beautifully dressed women gathered and chatted, while they drank their orange pekoe, and abstained from sandwiches if they were trying to reduce.

There was a pleasant little flutter about the place.

Subdued tinkle of silver on fragile china; happy, idle laughter; breezes of half-guessed perfume when a lovely lady passed; lights that turned faces into soft, rosy flowers; and here and there a starched waitress, smiling and courteous, and daintily marcelled.

"Don't expect Mother to sympathize with women who aren't understood. She has one wonderful slogan for all discontented women! Submerge! She's like the immortal youth in 'Excelsior.' She'd like to go about bearing a banner with Submerge written on it, except that her motto would prevent her from bothering enough about other victims' needs to bear a banner. One can't be totally submerged in a man's personality, if she is carrying a banner for the rest of the world, can she?" Thus Nancy.

"That's not fair, Nancy," Sally protested meekly. "You're always teasing me about that. I'm sure I don't know what you mean."

"Of course you don't, darling. That's why you're so precious." Nancy smiled fondly. "Isn't she the most delicious thing in the world, Emily? Imagine her! She should be put in a nice glass case and mounted in the public square: 'The only woman in captivity who has no problem,'" Nancy proclaimed. "'The only woman in captivity who's happy and proud of it.'"

"Why, Nancy, I've got problems! Eric's been sent to Camp, and Daddy's working too hard," Sally began. But Nancy and Emily broke in laughing.

"Oh, darling, don't you see, those are the problems of the submerged?"

"Never mind, Sally. We're all jealous of you—all we women in the world who have never found anyone wonderful enough for us to become submerged in," Mrs. Swan said. But Sally felt certain she was saying it only because she suspected Nancy's teasing hurt a little.

"But, Emily, it isn't as if she hadn't a sweet, wonderful personality of her own! It seems such a shame for her to be wasted by blotting up every thought she ever had by one of Daddy's! She's lost herself completely in him, and I'm sure she had a too-wonderful self to lose," Nancy went on, half in earnest now.

"Why, do you know, Mother never had a thought in her life that she didn't show to Daddy and meekly make over to conform to his. It would be deceiving him to keep some thoughts for her very own, and of course she couldn't deceive him."

They were discussing her before herself, just as grown people discuss a child in his presence. Sally wondered if the child felt as she did—as though he must speak up for himself and tell them how ludicrous was their interpretation.

"But look how happy they've been," Emily Swan pointed out. "I wonder if the self-expression that we're always singing about means as much as happiness, when it's all said?"

"That is beside the point." Nancy dismissed happiness with a flip of her white fingers. "Danger never happened to come near them. Mother never had a chance to be unhappy. No trouble, no sorrow, nor danger ever threatened her. Did it, Mother?" She looked



at her mother briefly for confirmation. Young, confident Nancy.

"No—it didn't," said Sally, and smiled, remembering the two unspoken menaces that threatened her life and Peter's and the children's. She wondered what the three of them—Nancy and Emily and herself—would have been like now if she had waded into the trouble that was waiting for her when she came back from that month, seven years ago—if she had gone with Mrs. Kelly's letter to Peter and demanded an explanation. Whether or not it had been true—what Mrs. Kelly hinted—the serenity of their lives would have been upset, much or little, by that, surely.

Now they sat, the three of them, pleasantly chatting and drinking their tea, while she wore the other woman's violets. Perhaps they might have been scattered over the country, thinking of each other bitterly. Nancy, pitying and disdainful of her mother because of her jealousy; Mrs. Swan deprived of the friendship of this girl who had meant, Sally suspected, a change in her mode of living; and Sally herself, working to support herself alone some place, bewildered and bitter from the destruction of her scheme of life.

She wondered, too, what difference it might have made if she had not placed her own body between Peter and the menace of his father. Peter, whose confidence in himself had tottered so perilously through his early life because of his imagined inheritance from his father, would have gone down certainly, if he had known the truth. Nancy might not have been the radiant thing she was now. There would have been no

money to send her to college; her youth and faith might have been blunted; she might have been a mediocre creature, filling some drab place in a different world. Sally smiled.

"No—no danger ever threatened us," she said.



## *Chapter Twenty-three*

### ERIC GROWS UP

#### I

EARLY in the spring after the Armistice, Mrs. Swan wrote that she was coming home, and wanted Nancy to come and stay with her for a time. She was worn out, she said, and much in need of Nancy. Emily planned to open her house at Chestnut Hill, just outside of Boston. She took it for granted Nancy would come.

Nancy was delighted. She was being graduated in June, and was in a state of indecision as to what to do with herself.

"This is exactly what I need, Mother—a chance to know the sort of life Emily will have around her. She knows such interesting people always. Why, just think what that one little summer I spent with her did for me," Nancy said.

Sally knew from the beginning that the child would have to go, of course, but it grieved her that she should never once speak about being sorry that she was leaving home.

"Well, you have many interesting friends of your own, dear," she said carefully, "and Daddy and I have done everything we could to make your home comfortable and pleasant for you."

"I know, darling. It's dear, and I've been dreadfully happy with you. But I must see many kinds of life, Mother, if I'm going to write anything worth while," Nancy said a little impatiently. "We're all too happy here. There is no real drama here, you know."

Peter was strongly opposed to letting Nancy go. "Why can't we fix up a studio for her, if that's what Mrs. Swan says she'll do? She could have the guest room. We only use it for her friends when they stay here after a dance, anyway. I'll have another window cut in it if she needs more light. Seems sorta funny to me we haven't got enough room for a typewriter in this house, with eight rooms and only three of us here."

"Well, that isn't it exactly, Daddy," Sally explained. "Nancy feels she needs to know more about the world—to see more kinds of people. Of course Emily can introduce her to people who'll help her, I suppose."

Peter was unconvinced. "All kinds of people are alike. The things that happen to them may be different, but in themselves everyone is alike," he said sagely. "Rich people are worried over whether they can afford a winter at Palm Beach, and poor people are worried about buying the coal. The worry itself is just the same. Life's just the same for everybody, almost. The outside things are different, but inside it's all the same; wanting things, and gettin' 'em, or not gettin' 'em."

But in the end, of course, Nancy went.

"Why, darlings, you'd think I was going to Turkey

and never could come back," she laughed tremulously, looking into their crestfallen faces as they waited for her train at the Union Station. "This is supposed to be a joyous trip for me, and you look as though I were going to prison for life."

Ruefully they tried to laugh. The score of friends who formed a noisy group around Nancy—seeing her off—were very gay. Sally and Peter tried to fit into the picture.

After they came home, there seemed nothing to do. Peter tried to read his paper, and Sally looked for something to sew on. All of her own clothes were mended, and there was nothing more to make for Nancy.

"She'll never live here any more," she told herself, tearlessly. "She'll come back to visit sometimes, but it won't be the same. She'll forget which drawer the towels are in, and I'll have to lay them out for her like a guest."

She rocked softly in her chair. Then, for fear Peter might think she were sad, she began to hum merrily.

## 2

In July Eric got his discharge from the Army. He was apologetic about never having gotten across. He felt, as old Joles would have, that the good things sorta passed him by.

"Just because I happened to know a little bit about machinery, they stuck me off in an old backwoods camp, mendin' automobiles. Helluva reward for knowin' a



little bit, instead of not knowin' how to do nothin' but keep in step when you're walkin'," he said.

Peter didn't like him to say "Helluva," but he didn't mention it until Eric said it in Sally's presence.

"Now that don't add nothin' to a man's value," he said sternly. "Anybody can swear, and it beats me why a lotta young kids like you think there's somethin' smart about it. All it does is keep you from sayin' what you mean. I know fellas that can't think of any words to say what they wanta except cussin'. They say 'damn fine' and 'damn rotten,' and they expect people to know what they're talking about. You better cut it out," Peter advised. And Eric, remembering how the Bohunks and Polacks had followed his father around the Yard waiting to do something for him, tried to take his advice.

"I gotta hurry up and get back my old job at the Yard if I can. I wanta get married," Eric said to his mother after he had been home several days.

She was a girl who had a Civil Service position, typing records at Eric's camp. She was trying to get transferred back to Washington, so they could be together, Eric said. She didn't have any home. Her mother had been dead since she was a youngster, and her father didn't take much interest in her.

"I didn't write to you about her, because a letter is so sorta silly," he explained. "I hate to write, except about the weather and things like that."

Sally was glad. It gave her something new to think about. She wrote the girl a letter. She was Marian Sawyer, a nice wholesome name, Sally thought. She

was glad it wasn't some silly name like Ernestine. Jerry Kelly had married a girl in Chicago named Ernestine. She smoked cigarettes.

Eric had a picture of Marian, but it was taken under a lilac bush, where the flowers made shadows on the girl's face. Sally and Peter looked at it through Peter's reading glass, but they couldn't make much out of it.

"She ain't so much on looks," Eric said uneasily, when they asked about her.

## 3

Eric hopped from the street car and hurried into the station, afraid someone would notice him. He was meeting Marian without letting anyone know. Then, if it didn't come out right, Sally and Peter needn't know. He hated managing it in this sneaky way, but it was the best he could do, he thought. It wasn't as though Dad could do anything to help, and of course, Mother was out of the question. It would kill them to know; they'd take anything like that so much to heart.

Marian came swinging through the gate, with her exaggerated, swaying step. It made men look around after her. But her clothes, just as always, were dowdy and a little old-maidish. That, perhaps, was what made the sensuality of her walk so pronounced. She wore an ugly brown coat, and a little round hat with a red feather tilting off the side. The hat was too small for her. She had bought it in the basement of a bargain store.

But her eyes were dewy, and her lips were full and scarlet, and when she spoke her voice was throaty and tender. There was something sticky in her voice, like molasses candy of which you have eaten too much. Her hair never smelled quite clean.

Eric hurried forward to meet her, and she kissed him moistly, much to his embarrassment. He took her bag.

"Your folks here?" she asked, brushing back a lock of her heavy hair with an ungloved hand. Her hair was the color of ploughed land, lusterless and massed.

"No. I thought we'd better have a little talk first. How about goin' over to a hotel until we decide what to do?" he suggested, ill at ease.

"Suits me," she agreed. "Your mother wrote me a letter. She must be all right."

Eric paled. "Did you write to her?" he asked.

"No, I didn't except to answer her little letter. I didn't say nothin'," she said sullenly.

They found a rooming house for transients on Massachusetts Avenue near the station. The proprietor was not so careful as she was avaricious. Nevertheless she looked inquiringly at Eric when Marian asked about a room.

"This is my brother. He's rooming on East Capital Street. I on'y want this room for a night or so, until his landlady has a room for me," she explained coolly.

The landlady nodded. It always seemed silly to go through the ceremony of asking, but the police were strict about giving you your lodging house license.

She personally felt it was none of her business what went on in her rooms, so long as the lodgers kept quiet and paid their rent.

Eric and Marian sat down in the dismal room—far apart—when they were alone. It had the same anti-septic, inhospitable air about it as that other miserable room they had known—the same perfunctory furnishing, scarred dresser, rickety rocking chair, double bed, lumpy and sagging, and absurd pictures on the wall. A lodging house room stamped all over it. It made Eric uncomfortable, just as that other room had.

“Well?” Marian said, in her molasses candy voice, buttoning the top button of her starched blouse, which had slipped open.

“I mean to do the right thing, you know,” Eric began in a shamed whisper. “I ain’t goin’ to try to put nothin’ over on you. You know that, or I wouldn’t have agreed for you to come here where my family is. But I want to talk to you about it a little before you see ’em.”

“Sure, you’re goin’ to do the right thing,” Marian said defensively. “If you don’t, you know where I can put you.” Then her manner changed, “Listen, Eric. I don’t want you to feel this way about me. I’m no dose of medicine you gotta take, whether you want it or not. The youngster’s gone now, and there ain’t no chance of it making trouble. And I could go along just like I was.” She stopped a minute, then looked at him honestly from under her heavy brows. “I’m sorry I made that trouble for you. But you don’t know how scared I was, and the people I was livin’ with put

me up to it. They said the Army'd look after me and pay my expenses if I made enough fuss. But I'm sorry I did. Maybe things mighta been different if I'd waited for you to do somethin'—"

"Yeh, I'd've married you all right, Marian," he admitted. His voice cracked comically, "I'd'a done that much anyway. Well, never mind. That trouble's over, and the family don't know nothin' about it. The thing to do now is to decide what we'll do."

"It don't matter now. If you don't want to marry me, I can take care of myself," she said grimly. "I ain't so crazy about marryin' you anyway." But her lip trembled.

"I'm plannin' to, girl. I got a little money saved for it, and I told my mother—just that I wanted to marry you." Eric added the last quickly. "We c'n make somepin' outa it yet if we use our heads. Ain't no sense of you wanderin' 'round loose. I owe you just as much as if the baby'd lived, and I want to make it up to you. Only thing I want is for you to have respect for my family and not let 'em know anything about it," he said.

"What you think I am? I ain't belonged to a family ever, y'know, and I wouldn't be apt to be queerin' myself with nice folks like yours if I got a chance to belong to 'em, would I?" She spoke almost angrily. "I'm just as square as you are, when nobody's tryin' to influence me wrong," her hands, pitifully thick and tallow-white, plucking clumsily at her skirt.

"It'd just about kill 'em," Eric cautioned her. "You see my folks don't know nothin' about anything wrong



in the world. I can't tell you, but you'll see what I mean when you see 'em together—Father and Mother. They wouldn't understand how we come to do it. That's why it was so rotten of you to say you was going to write to 'em." His anger flared momentarily.

"Forget it. I told you I was just scared crazy. I wouldn'ta done it, maybe," she said roughly. Then tears came into her eyes. "You don't know how scared I was, Eric. But I'll do the right thing by you now, 'cause you're doin' it for me, and we'll forget all the rest." He came over and kissed her cautiously.

"So that's settled. I'll bring you home to-morrow. How's that? I'll tell 'em to-night I got word you're comin', and Mother can get ready for you."

She nodded and wiped her nose.

Eric felt freer than he had for months, now that he was doing the right thing, and there was no danger of people talking about his mistake. He would protect his father and mother from ever having people talk!

## 4

Sally was nervous, waiting for Eric to bring the strange new girl from the station. She felt that this was the most critical test she had ever faced—meeting this girl who was going to be Eric's wife. Suppose she shouldn't measure up to the girl's standards! Suppose Marian Sawyer shouldn't like her and would take Eric away from them in the way wives sometimes did!

She remembered the first time she had gone to see Magnold in her little house, torn down, now that Mag-

nold was dead. She wondered if Peter's mother had felt about her as she felt about this girl. Perhaps Marian was frightened, as the young Sally had been. That cheered her a little. She would think only of making her comfortable, and that would help her own discomfort.

She ran again into the little guest bedroom, to make sure everything was ready. On the bed table was a little jar of ferns, gathered from the vacant lot next door. She had put some of the face powder Nancy left in the little powder jar and placed it on the dressing table. She wanted Marian to know she understood girls. She wished she had some cold cream to offer her, after her ride on the train. It was refreshing, the advertisements said.

Downstairs she heard them coming in, Peter, who had met them as they got off the street car, laughing noisily, and bustling about, putting Marian's umbrella in the stand and setting her suitcase in the corner.

"Mother, Mother, come down! She's here," Peter called hospitably.

Sally hurried down the steps, breathlessly. Eric, flushed and embarrassed, still stood beside the door, his hat held in clumsy fingers. Marian looked at her with troubled, slate-colored eyes and an uncertain smile.

"My dear, we're so glad to have you," Sally said, taking her hand. She looked at her a moment, and then took the girl in her arms and kissed her. "Have you been afraid of me as I've been of you?" she asked, laughing unsteadily.

Marian giggled uncomfortably and brushed her hand across her eyes. "Well, sorta," she admitted in her throaty voice.

"Come up to your room, and then you can help me take up dinner. It's all ready in the fireless cooker. I thought you'd be hungry," Sally said, locking her arm in Marian's and starting upstairs with her.

"You don't know how glad I am to have you be just a nice, folksy girl. I've imagined you all kinds of ways—haughty, and silly, and not quite nice, even. You know men are so funny, and I couldn't be sure what kind of a girl Eric might want to marry," she confessed. Marian laughed her uneasy laugh.

"I've been worryin' about you, too. I wasn't sure you'd be glad to see me. You see, I haven't any family of my own, and don't know just how they are," she said.

"Well, you have one now, all right," Sally assured her.

5

It seemed strange to have Marian in the house. Sally went in to kiss her good night, after Marian and Eric came back from a ride in the car. She had already gone to bed, without taking her hair down. Sally tried not to notice it.

"Still, maybe she has to put it up in curlers, and she was a little timid about gettin' them on this first night," she excused her prospective daughter-in-law.

"Seems kinda funny havin' Eric gettin' married,

don't it?" Peter said with a little smile, when she came back into their room. "Nice, sensible girl, though. She'll probably make him a good, practical wife." But he was wondering. Surely his son couldn't find the touchstone of ecstasy in this big-boned creature, with her messy hair and thick fingers. Still. . . .

"You don't know what a relief it is for me to see Eric gettin' married right," he admitted suddenly. "You know, Mother, I've been worryin' for fear he'd take after my father—take up with some fancy woman and come out wrong."

"You like her, Daddy?" Sally asked timidly. "Is she what you'd expected?"

"Well, she ain't very pretty, in some ways," he admitted, not meeting Sally's eyes, "but she seems to have a lot of sense. We'll do all we can to get 'em started right, Mother."

## 6

After Eric and Marian were married, they lived for a few weeks with Sally and Peter—just until they could find a satisfactory furnished room, and Marian learned her way around the city.

Sally was gentle with the big, uncouth girl, and if her crudities hurt Eric's mother, she gave no sign. She and Peter were bound by an unspoken pact of loyalty to their new daughter, so that they never spoke of her shortcomings. Sally felt that helped.

"I think you'd be awfully nice looking in one-piece frocks," she said to Marian gently. "I've got a lovely

pattern, and we'll get some nice material and make you one."

Marian wore nothing but skirts and stiff blouses. Her clothes were all ready-made and incongruously matched. A sport coat and a lace dress hat, black satin slippers and a plaid skirt. Little by little, Sally made her over in a gentler pattern. She did it so tactfully that the younger woman did not feel that her alterations implied criticism.

"I'm gettin' so I kinda like to sew. I never thought I would," she said proudly, after she had made some simple white underwear. "I'm gettin' so I kinda plan things now. I wouldn't be surprised if you'd make a dressmaker outa me, Mother," she said, with her heavy humor.

"Marian is awfully fond of you, Eric. You must make her proud," she told her son. "She's a nice girl. You can make anything you want of her, if you're gentle and loving to her. She's awful fond of you."

"I know," said Eric briefly. Sally wondered apprehensively if Eric had discovered the baffling lack of imagination in his wife. She hoped he never would.





## *Chapter Twenty-four*

### TURNING THE CORNER

#### 1

NANCY borrowed a day—the first day of her life helmed completely by herself. She left Washington for Boston on June 25, but Emily didn't expect her until June 27. Happy juggling of dates, a blithely perpetrated fib, gave Nancy a day when none in the world could ask for an accounting.

So brave, so eager to discover herself amidst the myriad impressions superimposed upon her, she was a young Columbus navigating in quest of a new self. She wondered desperately just what she was like. She wished she could meet herself unexpectedly, as one sometimes does in a sudden mirror. Surely she owed herself this glorious day to get acquainted with that arrogant young person with whom she was pledged to spend the rest of her life!

She walked down Boylston Street, peeping anxiously in the windows to watch that shadowy Nancy, striding in step with her. She felt she looked rather well, though she could faintly smell the straw-dye with which Sally believed optimistically last year's hat had been transformed. She knew her coat was wrong, somehow, but her flat hips were most marvelously right. Better that, she mused, than a right coat on wrong hips!

She wondered avidly about the faces she passed . . . . concealing faces with eyes that were confessions . . . . open-book faces, fresh like Mother's, pitifully offering themselves for whatever you chose to write upon them in kindness or rebuke . . . . an avaricious face above a petulant orchid . . . . a slyly humorous face in a dusty derby.

Crazy quilts of tulips were flung here and there about the Public Gardens. Glorious extravagance of pansies, marching obediently in battalions of color, bordered the walks, and the amazing swan-boats, newly painted a dazzling white and carnival red, floated serenely with the patient pedaling of a gray little man. What a world, so pleasantly patterned, so incredibly strange and ready!

Pigeons gossiped upon the shoulders of Edward Everett Hale, tolerant and kind in his broad bronze; six little Italians hurried past on their way to the Frog Pond in the Latin abandon of tattered bathing suits. Yesterday—last week—it had all been just as it was now, but no Nancy to complete it. Well, she was here now, and the play could commence.

## 2

Emily's house, like Emily herself, had materialized from a million dollar movie. Unbelievably it had three dimensions, and did not end abruptly in scaffolding, as Nancy had seen "set" palaces end, in those chummy, just-between-us movies about Hollywood. Perfect as it was—a real house with fuses that sometimes "blew out", and roofs that must be painted.

Emily's house was always on a voyage from one plan of decoration to another, and the plans were always overlapping.

"Well, it's all I have, really, for a toy," Emily explained defensively, when friends gasped "Again?" at news of her remodeling. Rooms were always being "done over", new gardens being built, a tennis court transformed overnight, with a mural of imported vines.

And now there was a studio to be built for Nancy. Nancy protested that she'd better do a little work to warrant such an elaborate workshop, but Emily brushed this aside.

"I saw just the place in southern France," she said, all alight with inspiration. "And I'm going to have it built for your very own, dearest."

Architects and decorators paid daily and nightly attendance, and if Nancy's part in the new scheme was forgotten perhaps that didn't matter. Emily was happy, and her household breathed content.

Nancy was half uncomfortable, remembering the shabby little room where she had crouched beside her bed and written heady nonsense far into the night. "I know I'll get stage fright in that place," she said to herself.

At last the studio was ready, and Emily invited "everyone" to a housewarming. The studio was built some distance from the house, in a grove of ancient pines. Emily's old Scotch gardener had cherished a secret wild flower garden in the spot, but that was ripped away to make room for Emily's latest toy. It

was a complete house, really, with sleeping quarters and a compact kitchen on the balcony, and a tall, wide workroom, undivided and vast. Two gigantic fireplaces yawned at each other from opposite ends of the room, and an expansive north-light formed the other side.

The floor was finished for dancing—just in case, you know—and luxurious Chinese rugs sprawled here and there.

The new jade-colored typewriter waited ready, elegant and mocking. A box of crisp bond stood deferentially at hand; a thesaurus dozed on the big desk. Indeed everything was present, but Necessity.

Nancy came brisk and early the morning after the housewarming. "I'm going to keep hours, just like an office," she told Emily firmly.

"Will you be home for lunch, honey, or shall Mattie pack a dinner pail?" Emily asked, fondly.

It was a gorgeous morning, murmurous and warm. . . .really a morning for starting things.

Nancy knew just what she wanted to write—an ironical tale of a woman who could never repeat any experience. She must always have something new, until at last she exhausted all novelty, except death. She rolled a sheet of bond into the shiny carriage and clicked out the splendid title,

"O N C E"

What a word—once! It must have been the first one the Lord made, on that first, inchoate morning. If you called it out across a crowd, waiting, let's say, for a parade to commence, what would it start down the

corridors of their minds? Guilty things. . . . shy. . . .sad. . . .lost? The saddest word, no doubt, that could be said. . . .so splendidly alone.

Nancy took out the paper and rolled in another sheet. She wrote it again. If Daddy and Mother could only see her! Oh, they mustn't. People wouldn't understand Daddy and Mother. Suppose they came, for a surprise. It would be like them. She began to worry. She saw Peter, clumsily clodding over Emily's Chinese rugs. . . .so unhappy. Mother, too pleased about everything. She saw Emily's friends, too kind.

Then suddenly Nancy was desperately lonely for her own people. She almost hated this place—so alien, so elegant. What on earth did it all mean?

Well, "Once" was certainly gone now. She got up and walked about, moving the pillows and the vases, opening books, studying her face discontentedly a moment in the mirror. Such a sappy face, she felt. Too brightly colored. She wished she were a magnolia person. . . .long Marie Laurencin eyes, a mouth like a whisper. . . .somber hair.

This morning was certainly spoiled! Well, it was time for luncheon now.

### 3

Living in Emily Swan's house at Chestnut Hill was like being born in a new world to Nancy. The house had been designed by two spinster sisters with romantic inclinations, in pure Italian Renaissance style. Crowned a high hill overlooking Boston, it seemed a spot



of the old world, with its courts, and balconies, and pergolas. The house itself was not large; nor was it ostentatious; but the low massive parapet, binding the top terrace on the north and west sides, enclosed a forecourt of extravagant beauty. In the center of this court, a fountain tossed a white plume. Urns held tropical looking castor beans, whose bright reflections mingled with the water lilies and made brilliant ghosts, through which gold fish swam indolently. Lou Dane had sent Emily the castor beans from South America.

Nancy might have found the extensive formal gardens, dotted here and there with white stone benches and pretentious garden toys, almost sad in their perfection, had it not been for the host of friends with whom Emily Swan kept herself amused.

Emily's old negro, Mattie, was established in the kitchen, triumphant at having her "chile" back at home again, ready to settle down to belated happiness.

"All foolishment, Miss Emily goin' over and winnin' the wah! Plenty trashy people coulda done it 'ithout her wastin' her time, when she ain't had no happiness in her life hardly," old Mattie said irately, whirling one of her delectable pastry concoctions around in a huge crock. Her strong black arm expressed her impatience with all lesser people.

Emily's crown of braids was white now, but her face was as young as it had ever been, except for a lace veil of wrinkles about her vivid eyes. She still wore the brilliant colors she had always loved, jade green, nasturtium, violet. She was like a slim, white-haired

girl at a masquerade, Nancy said. No one in the world was ever quite so beautiful to Nancy.

"You've spoiled me, dear," Emily said. "I am positively greedy for your admiration. You make me feel somehow like a queen."

"And you make me feel like a princess," Nancy replied. "I shall have a dreadfully difficult time adjusting myself to the humdrum world, after living here with you."

"You're dearer to me than anyone else on earth, you know, and I want to give you all the things I should have given my own little girl. I want you to think of this as belonging to you just as much as though you were really my daughter, Nan. There never can be any silly question of gratitude about it, either, because you have done for me so much more than you ever can know. . . ."

Nancy hardly knew what to say. Rare tears came into her eyes. "Why, Emily, how can you imagine I've ever done anything for you? From the time I first knew you, when I was a funny, self-conscious little girl on Second Street, with Mother away and the weight of the world on my shoulders, you've been helping me!" she said. "Sometimes I wake up in the night wondering what on earth I've ever done to deserve you."

Most of the restless ones who felt the peace of Emily's house, and Emily herself, were men—discontented, successful men, who had overlooked many things in their search for many more.

Women had an inherent suspicion of Emily which

Nancy never could understand. There were a few women, however—rather pathetic ones—who longed passionately to be attractive, and who felt that by playing with an attractive woman they might absorb a little of the atmosphere.

Gwen Thomas, with prominent teeth and bangs that were uncontrollable no matter how elaborately her hair was waved, had been a friend of Emily's husband. Gwen had upheld Emily at the time of her divorce, in spite of public opinion. Mrs. Curtis Carsen, who made a frantic effort to shrink her forty-five years to thirty-five, in order to conceal the discrepancy between her own and her young husband's age, spent a great deal of her time organizing gay parties with Emily. Sylvia Williver, quite bitter because her voice had failed at the threshold of an operatic career, brought her aged husband over to Emily's, to make him ridiculous, as often as possible. She seemed to find sly amusement in watching the feeble old creature make absurd attempts to keep up with the activities of the younger people.

Nancy had detested Sylvia, with her carmined lips and long, cruel eyes, ever since the night old Timmy Williver had tried to go swimming with the rest of them, and had had a chill. The fragile little old man, with his timid blue eyes and cowed thin lips, had been ridiculous in his baggy bathing suit. But he had been very game about going into the icy water. He had huddled on the float wretchedly, until Nancy noticed him and swam with him back to the shore. There he collapsed, and had to be almost carried up to the

house by Emily's chauffeur, wrapped in a woolly blanket and whimpering like a child. Sylvia didn't even go up with him—merely lighted another cigarette and laughed.

"Damn little vain peacock! Never can get it through his head that he's a patriarch," she said.

But these were the people whom Emily endured only because they had some particular influence that she thought might be valuable to Nancy some day. She allowed them to turn her house into a country club, always with the mental reservation that they would some day have to pay for the privilege by helping Nancy. She was quite unscrupulous in assembling potential influence for her "child."

Nancy was bewildered by Emily's toleration of this noisy, discontented throng. She knew that Gwen Thomas' brother was one of the foremost publishers in the country, and that Mrs. Carsen owned a great deal of motion picture stock, but she never construed any relation between these facts and Emily's cultivation of these people.

"Why do you let them wear you out, dear?" she asked one night, when she came out of her own suite, where she had retired while the "mob" was cavorting through a "party", and found Emily utterly exhausted.

"Did you never hear that jolly little question as to whether or not there is any sound in a forest when a tree falls, if there is no ear to hear it?" Emily replied, with her weary little smile.

"Well, I don't see what that has to do with letting those delirious dumb-bells stay all night and keep up

their silly capering," Nancy said inelegantly. "It isn't as though you enjoyed them."

But Emily didn't explain.





## *Chapter Twenty-five*

### A DREAM COMES TRUE

#### 1

EMILY was generous—embarrassingly so. “Well, money is all I have, you know,” she said to Nancy. “It’s as though I gave you permission to take a deep breath, when there is plenty of air.”

Nancy tried to put her visit on a business basis. “Let me just borrow what I need, Emily, and pay you back when I begin making some money,” she begged.

“Listen to me, child. Nobody ever really makes sacrifices, you know. If people appear to be giving something away, you may be sure they’re being satisfactorily paid in some way or other. If I happen to get more happiness out of having you here—out of doing little things for you, keeping you dressed adorably—you’ve got to let me do it. After all, I earned this money, and it owes me all the happiness I can squeeze out of it. I put all the crucifixation into those few years with Albert Swan that most people crowd into a lifetime, and if his money can buy me your delight . . . well it’s all a part of squaring up.”

Nancy determined to keep account of her indebtedness. But when the monthly allowance that Emily insisted upon amassed too alarming proportion, she

gradually neglected to set it down. And the expense of the clothes that Emily took such delight in buying could only be guessed at. Nancy knew that the ash-soft squirrel coat Emily bought, because it made her hair a startling orange, cost more than Peter earned in a month.

But she couldn't help exulting in the simple, subtle little clothes that made life such a darling, dress-up game. Silken lingerie was severe in cut and persuasive in texture; patrician little shoes wore their arched trees gaily along her shoe shelf; sport clothes, misty-colored and straight, were all her dreams of "un-fussiness" come true. She adored the complicated ritual of her bath . . . . the perfumes Emily selected, the deceptively simple fragrance of her powders . . . . and Emily's own maid, borrowed frequently for special ministrations. The maid was a girl of her own age, prettier than herself. Nancy could never allow herself to gossip with 'Von, because there was too poignant a similarity about them. Fate might so easily have switched them about so that Nancy might have been massaging 'Von's tired tennis muscles!

Work simply wouldn't get done in the studio. Morning after morning Nancy sat chained to her desk, fuming and wretched. "Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party," she typed over and over down a page, to punish herself, and to make Emily think work was going along. Oh, if only some good men *could* come to the aid of the country of her imagination. It certainly *was* the time.

"I'll begin soon," she promised herself desperately,

but she had a clammy certainty in the pit of her stomach that she couldn't begin. The horror of those mornings, so beautiful and so barren, was too awful to be borne. If only something would happen! If Emily would be stricken with leprosy, so Nancy could go with her, devoted and renunciatory, to the plague islands, wherever they were! If Daddy should be taken suddenly sick—only slightly sick, just enough to send for Nancy. If only something would rescue her from this nervous inertia. She grew certain she never *could* write.

She saw herself keeping up her deception for years . . . . a gaunt middle-aged woman accepting Emily's hospitality, and promising payment she knew could never be made. She had never been so feverishly wretched . . . . or so gay.

Emily bragged about her to her friends . . . . showed her off . . . . indulgently pilfered her enthusiasms . . . . petted and played with her . . . . and unconsciously heaped unhappiness upon her.

"If nothing happens by Thursday, I'm disappearing," Nancy said to herself sternly. "I'm simply disappearing. I'll take my old clothes and this month's allowance, and simply go away. I'll be a waitress, or work in a laundry or something. I simply can't stand this."

But Thursday saw dawn . . . . a false dawn. Nancy had a new idea. She tried hard to work it out; she even went at midnight to the studio and, shivering and sick, pecked furiously at the typewriter. But when she read it over, after two hours' sleep and a bath, she knew it was hopeless.

Emily found her gulping childishly and dropping tears on the inadequate bag she was packing.

"What nonsense, darling," she said, sitting down and crumpling Nancy on her knees, "what utter nonsense! Of course you aren't going to work like that any more. The idea of your thinking you had to get something done all of a sudden! Why, you can't expect to write anything for a year at least. Besides, you don't know anything to write about. You've got to play with me, and let me tell you what life is like."

She rocked back and forth. "Emily'll show you, dearest," she crooned comfortingly. "Emily knows the way to do it."

It was so good . . . so unbelievably comforting. Yet it only quieted Nancy's conscience temporarily. Underneath she lashed herself as cruelly as ever.

"I'll simply show her," she vowed. "Any day now, I may do it."

## 2

Months passed happily at Chestnut Hill. Nancy played not nearly as much as Emily thought she should.

"I can play afterwards, when I have done something worth playing about," she said grimly. "I must work now, as hard as I can. Why, you know, sometimes people have to write almost all their lives before anyone pays any attention to them!"

"Not real people like you, Nan," Emily said confidently. "You're bound to meet success in a little while."

They went to New York every once in a while to strengthen their contact with the influential people Emily knew there, and to keep up with the literary gossip.

At the end of two years, the stories were beginning to sell, and Nancy had nearly completed her first novel. Emily pinned high hopes to getting some actress interested in having Nan write a play for her.

Nancy's own income was sufficient to supply her needs, now, but Emily insisted on continuing her allowance. "Put this money away to do something special. It makes me happy to provide for you; perhaps it would make you happy to provide for someone else," she said.

"I could give Daddy his farm that he's always wanted! Wouldn't they love that! They have been so precious to me all my life, and worked in every way they could for my happiness!" Nancy felt about these people of hers almost as though they were her children. She loved sending them "surprises", intricate electrical household tools for Sally, a long beaver coat, heavy soft velvets, that she loved, and for Peter a radio set, frivolous accessories for his automobile, and a bag of golf sticks, which amused him immensely. He kept them in a conspicuous corner of the hall, and chuckled every time he passed them. Probably no golf clubs, fulfilling their legitimate destiny, ever yielded more enjoyment than Peter's—which never saw a golf green.

But Nancy had a nice respect for their feelings, and wondered always if the richness of her gifts was go-



ing to hurt their pride. She wanted Sally not to stop making her hand-embroidered underwear, and the little homemade sachets and handkerchiefs.

There was something infinitely pathetic about these little boxes from home, brought up by the maid, and opened on the satin counterpane in Nancy's dainty boudoir.

The box was usually a knitting yarn box, or an old shoe box, and inside, lovingly wrapped in tissue paper, would be the fragrant lump of linen, sewn in stitches not so fine as they used to be, because Sally's eyes were dimmer now. The little garment, unattached and unprotected by Sally's aura of love, seemed to huddle timidly in the midst of Nancy's finery. She thought of the pink crocheted nightgown yoke, and the fears she had had that it wouldn't be understood. She hugged her mother's little gift to her, and dropped tears upon it. . . .

## 3

Twice a year Nancy visited Sally and Peter in Washington. Sally made elaborate new dishes for her approval, and inquired timidly if that was the way they were served in restaurants.

"I'd like to get hold of an alligator pear sometime," she said. "I've read they make lovely salad. What're they like anyway?"

Peter was scrupulous in his table manners. It touched Nancy to see him so careful. Sometimes, when he got interested in what he was telling her, he

forgot. Then he would recover himself gloomily, and glance at her sideways to see if she had noticed the lapse. Nancy felt like crying to him tenderly, "Darling, table manners are too little for you! Hold your fork any way you want to." But of course she couldn't say that.

Eric's wife was continually on the defensive, for fear Nancy would patronize them. It made it difficult for Nancy, because at the same time her sister-in-law frequently intimated that Nancy was selfish in enjoying her own luxury and not taking her mother and father into it.

"We'd ask you over to our house for dinner some night, but I know you wouldn't enjoy it," she said ungraciously. "We've only got two furnished rooms, but we're going to begin buying a home, when Eric gets a little money ahead."

"Oh, I want to come," Nancy said impulsively. "Mother's told me how attractive you've made your rooms . . . and heavens, I'm one of the family," she reminded her, laughing uneasily.

"Well, I must say you don't look it, with everything you want, and becoming so famous and everything," Marian replied.

"She really likes you, Nancy. She's proud of you. She often tells people about what you are doing. That's just her way," Sally apologized later, when she and Nancy were alone. As a matter of fact, Marian owed her prestige in her community to the fact that she was Nancy's sister-in-law.

"My sister-in-law, you know, the famous writer,

wrote me that everything smart in the way of street-clothes this year is black in New York," she would say. She usually began her remarks to her colleagues by quoting Nancy—often on subjects which would have amazed Nancy.

Marian had fully intended to name her first child after the famous sister-in-law, but when it arrived it was a boy. Marian was at a loss to know how to overcome this obstacle, since there seemed no masculine version of Nancy's name. She finally compromised on "Nicholas", but as no one in the family seemed to realize the significance, she didn't press the point.

"We'll call him Nicky. He's named after an uncle of mine," she said meekly, with her perpetual undercurrent of truculence.

Sally was secretly troubled by Nancy's stories, whenever she read one. Nothing much happened in them, and the people always were sad.

"Why don't you write something cheerful that will make people happy, dear?" she suggested timidly. "Why don't you write about Eric and Marian, for instance? They had a right pretty little courtship, out in Arizona where they were both so homesick and everything. It'd please Marian a lot, too."

"Well, maybe I shall some day, when I get time. You see, I don't know Marian very well yet," Nancy promised vaguely.

Peter was a little ashamed of Nancy's stories. There were a lot of things in 'em which were better untalked about, he thought.

Peter had had to go back to less responsible work

after the war ended. It hurt his pride dreadfully, because he couldn't do the accurate work that he had done. His eyes were failing, but he wouldn't be persuaded that this was so.

"They've put up so many new buildings around the Yard, it shuts off all the light," he said, when he had to bend close to his instruments, and strain his eyes at the scales.

He talked continuously of the farm he wanted to find some day. No use telling Sally that he didn't feel he could do the work at the Yard much longer. She mustn't know that he was slipping, and that he had lost his prestige about the shops, going back to the general run of work with the youngsters who had barely learned their trade. Twice he heard himself called "Old Man Lauren." He was only a little past fifty, but the last years had been strenuous for him.

"They've got so many more machines running, the noise almost drives me crazy," he admitted one day, before he realized that probably it was his nerves and not the machines that had increased.

"Well, a fella never owns himself in a job like this. We're goina find the farm some of these days, and take a vacation from then on," he promised Sally.

## 4

The Spring after Nancy's novel was published she came home with a plan for Sally and Peter.

"I've got your wedding anniversary present all decided on, but you've got to take a few days off and go

with me to pick it out," she said, her eyes sparkling happily, as they had when she was a child with a "surprise".

"I want to buy you a farm from the new book, and we must take the car and begin looking for it immediately, so Daddy can get his garden in before it's too late."

Sally was delighted, but Peter protested that he couldn't take the time off now. He always made shy, bluff excuses when people did something for him.

"Yes, you can, Daddy! You've been talkin' about givin' up the Yard for months, and now's the time to do it—so Nancy can go with us to look for the farm," Sally said enthusiastically.

The next morning they started out merrily in the little touring car. Sally packed the same kind of luncheon the children and Peter had enjoyed so much when they used to take their Sunday street car rides along the canal. She slipped three raspberry lollypops in, as she had in the old days.

"I wish Eric could get off and come with us," she said, and then reveling in momentary disloyalty, "and leave Marian at home. She tries to put on too many airs."

They made their excursions every day for almost a week. Then they found exactly the place they were looking for, near Bluemont, in Virginia. It was not too big, and not too small, Sally pointed out, and besides there was a mountain in the background, thrown in free!

Plum trees were in bloom around the house, ("look-



ing like brides in their veils, I do declare," Sally said) and all sorts of plants were ready to bloom in the flower gardens.

Sally thought of the hollyhocks around the iron fence in the yard of The House, and the tiny square of earth that had encompassed her horticultural ventures. All this land . . . but no children to raise flowers for! She swallowed. Oh, well, maybe Nancy would have children some day, and they'd come out and stay with Grandma. Sally had a hard time remembering that Nicky was her grandson. There was something stolid and independent in the square, burly youngster that Sally could never account for.

Nancy deposited a check on Peter's account, and he paid the real estate agent . . . all at once! It seemed too simple, just making out a little, flimsy piece of paper with a few figures, and giving it to the agent. Peter didn't feel as though it could be quite right. He and Sally signed the deed, and he carried it home in his pocket—just like buying a pound of sugar! A house was something you purchased with month after month of sacrifice and planning, and finally claimed as your own. This didn't seem quite the same.

"I think it was pretty nice of Nancy to do this for us, don't you, Daddy?" Sally exulted.

"Certain'y was," he agreed.

But in his heart was a shamed little sensitiveness, because he had planned some day to buy a farm such as this, for Nancy's enjoyment. He remembered how he had laughed at himself for talking about his grandchildren, that first night in The House. He had been

so young, then, and so full of hope. His invention!

He had wanted Nancy to be like her mother, sweet and simple and dependent, to make some man happy and give him chubby children. This farm was to have been their vacation ground, and when he and Sally were through with it, it was to have been a splendid gift to them. And now Nancy untwisted her little gold fountain pen and wrote a check, and that was all there was to it. . . .



## *Chapter Twenty-six*

### BEAUTIFUL DANGER

#### I

LOU DANE had come back from Egypt. No one told Nancy that it was because of Lou that Emily had been divorced. She knew merely that they had been friends years before, when Emily was married. Nancy knew little about Emily's past life. Whatever it had been, she felt, it was merely a means to an end, and Emily as she was to-day certainly justified everything. Nancy's loyalty was impregnable. After several unsuccessful attempts to undermine it, people respected it.

They were playing bridge with Stannie and Martin Young, a newspaper writer, with whom Emily had become acquainted overseas. They heard a motor whirl up the drive, and before Emily's housemaid had time to answer the ring, Lou himself came bursting into the library where they were playing.

Emily's hands fluttered, and she dropped two cards on the floor. But she smiled her serene smile.

"Oh," she said, "you frightened me. Gwen told me you were in the country, but I thought. . . ."

"The country is too small, my dear, for me not to appear at your doorstep during the first twenty-four hours," he said. He had a deep, indolent voice, in-

triguing with its hint of ennui. There was a vibrant note about it, that suggested immense control.

He was above medium height, built loosely so that his movements were slow and almost insolently graceful. He had such a spoiled face, Nancy thought, watching him carefully . . . . the face a mother might show her sulking little boy to make him mend his ways. Broad sensitive mouth . . . . a not-quite-unconscious twist of irony to wing one corner. Laugh wrinkles streamed from the imperative eyes, and the brow below the fortuitously-grayed hair was as unworried as a nine-year-old's.

"So her name is Nancy . . . . it would be Nancy," he said looking at her amusedly, but spending the notes of his persuasive voice, nevertheless. Nancy restrained a nervous flutter and murmured cool nothings, but confusion tickled her backbone.

"Lou is my oldest friend, dear," Emily explained.

"He's come home to do some chemical research at Tech. He's raising castor beans in Peru. Not for castor oil, he tells me, but for airplane engines," she chattered on. "We're going to spoil him as much as we can, Nan, and see if we can't convince him he'd better stay here."

She presented him to the others, who moved their chairs back from the bridge table.

"Don't let me break up your game. I can come back another time just as well," Lou Dane said.

But he dominated the room with his presence, and it was out of the question to play while he was there. After a few moments of general talk, both Stannie

and Martin Young made excuses and departed.

Nancy and Emily and Lou sat on the great divan before the fire.

"Don't you like my child, Lou?" Emily asked.

"Too much, Em. I haven't known, until I saw her, just why it was that I had to come back to this gloomy country. There's been something pulling me for months, a queer nostalgia. That from me, always so proud of belonging to no particular country!" he said with his serious playfulness.

"Except the country of lovely ladies, Lou?" Emily asked lightly.

"No, Em. But your child is so young and sweet and eager looking, she stirs youth in me. I wish I were a good, reliable youngster, and that you would let me play with her."

"For a day and a night? I shall, dear!" Then she quoted softly:

"Love can but last in us here at his height  
For a day and a night. . . .

"But you must promise that at the end of your play-time you will go away, in your famous manner. Nancy has big things ahead of her; she couldn't give you more than a day and a night. Could you, Nancy? So for once, you would be finding your plans fitted someone else's, Louis Dane."

"Let me grow up, you two!" Nancy laughed, shaking her bright head restlessly, as an embarrassed little girl might. "I want to come into the conversation." Nancy had a sense that between these two



words had a curious significance. There was a delicate tension in the words of the man and woman tossing them so deftly back and forth. Things they were not saying vibrated in the air.

Before he left, Lou told them something of his adventures, back and forth across the world, probing unknown places of the earth for an antidote for his restlessness.

"What of Evelyn?" Emily asked idly.

"She's living in Paris, still. And not a divorce in sight. Such a subtle revenge for her to hold over me, isn't it?" He was flippant. But his eyes darkened, Nancy thought.

"Subtle because she doesn't realize that it is her tenacity that makes you so free for your adventuring," Emily said a little bitterly. And then, quickly, "I've hurt you. I'm sorry, Lou. I'm always forgetting that you don't feel about it so. That is your charm, I think—that you are able to philander so sincerely!"

"The same old habit, Em, being clever at the expense of kindness and truth," he said in his vibrant voice.

"Hear what he says about me!" Emily exclaimed archly. "Together only an evening and already he discovers how impossible I am! Thank heaven, you aren't so clever, Nan."

After he had gone, Emily came back and sank down again on the divan, a little wearily. After a minute she asked unwillingly, "Tell me what you think of Lou Dane, Nan. What is he like when he strikes you for the first time?"

"Why . . . . I really haven't been able to see him yet," Nancy replied evasively.

"I doubt if you will like him," said Emily. "You're a bit too young to appreciate Lou."

"Well, I like that! Give me time, at least!"

"You'll have time, all right. It looks as though he's going to be around for some months. Lou labors under a vast past of ex-patriotism, but at heart he's a shy spaniel, who likes to come close to the fire."

"I think he's pathetic," Nancy said, laconically.

"Pathetic? How? Oh, that would kill him, dear, to have you think him pathetic! He who has specialized successfully in being devilishly debonair." Emily chuckled wickedly.

"Probably that's it," Nancy replied in her pensive way. "Debonair devilishness is a cold pose to wear, going about the world, don't you think?"

"Possibly. Somebody's going to tell you before many days, if Lou stays in our world a while, that he broke my heart. I might as well tell you the straight of it, before someone garbles it for you," Emily said suddenly.

"Did he, darling?" Nancy asked tenderly.

"We loved each other for a little while, and then we stopped loving each other—quite naturally." [Emily, in her regal dignity!] "Consequently one or the other of us must have a broken heart! That's the absurd way people look at love. It must be something that you incorporate into your daily housekeeping, or there is something the matter with it. They simply ignore all the inexplicable loves that you may

know—and which wouldn't fit into your daily life at all. They cannot understand that some people would rather know love for a time and then close the chapter than to drag it through the desecration of monotony and anticlimax," Emily said, almost angrily.

"Not love, Emily," Nancy protested.

"Depending entirely upon what you mean by love, Nan. This particular kind was only the call of one gypsy to another. No, I might as well say it. The attraction of my fingers for his hair, of his lips for my throat, of our two voices, mingling miraculously together in a poignant chord . . . . Not love, dear, but something no less real."

"And, what was her name—Evelyn?" Nancy asked. "What about her?"

"We knew each other at Newport, soon after I married Albert Swan. She was always nasty to Lou with the unfathomable perverseness of a temperamentally cold woman towards the man whose ardor she has chilled. When she discovered we loved each other, after my baby died, she told us she would never divorce him. It seemed hideous to me. . . . I should have gone away with him, I think. But then our infatuation, or whatever you want to call it, died its natural death." Emily's voice was weary.

"We had known all along it wouldn't last, of course, and we would have been fools to have dragged it out to its logical disillusion. We were happy for two months. Then we said good-by. Do you think that is so horrible?"

"Not horrible, Emily, but a little hard to under-

stand, just at first," Nancy said honestly. And then, "What about now, Emily? Is there still the gypsy call? Or do you hate him now? Aren't you bitter at all?"

"Hate him?" Emily was astonished. "Why should I? He gave me two months of happiness—intoxicating happiness, no less wonderful because we had artistic conscience enough to realize its limitations. I have made a thousand mistakes in my life. I have been unhappy about things, and blundered into situations that I loathed, but I have never insulted myself by being ashamed and apologetic about happiness. Remorse is a simpering form of shame. I could never be remorseful about love, even though it lasted only a little while."

"But why must yours last only a little while? Sometimes there are loves that last throughout a whole lifetime. Like Mother's, and Daddy's. Wasn't there ever a man like Daddy for you?"

"Yes, there was a man like Daddy for me. But it would have hurt many other people if I had claimed him. And it would have meant such a lot of adjustment within himself. Perhaps after we had dragged our frightened little love through all of that, there wouldn't have been anything left of it. You see, he knew so little about himself, and me, and the rest of the world, I should have had to make a new soul for him. And I wasn't positive that I could put the ingredient of happiness into him, when I made him all over. It's a dreadful responsibility to open up a new self for a man. And besides, I would have hurt so

many people . . . . and none of them were my size at all. . . . What am I talking about anyway?" She laughed suddenly, and Nancy saw with astonishment that her lips were trembling and there were tears in her brilliant eyes.

"Oh, darling!" the younger woman cried compassionately.

"Don't humor me, Nan, or I shall be spilling tears down your neck. Imagine me, crying and telling you gloomy secrets! Isn't that choice? It isn't often that I produce the jumbled little riddle of my self for an indoor sport, is it? It's not a nice game, anyway. Let's go to bed."





## *Chapter Twenty-seven*

### HOW SIMPLE ARE PEOPLE?

#### 1

**E**VEN Nancy had to admit Lou was a marvelous playmate. Serious about nonsense. and adorably absurd about serious things.

The three of them played in an idle way. "I simply can't stand you two," Nancy protested weakly, about once a day. "You know I'm supposed to be working."

"This is vacation," Lou would insist. "Who ever heard of working on a day like this? Wait till it snows, Sugar-Child. This is a day meant for hair like yours—all cinnamon and ginger. Look't those leaves. Just your color! C'mon."

And Nancy used to go, scolding herself all the time. "Why, really I don't like him, except when I'm with him. Well, why don't I leave him alone? This gives me a grand chance to work, with Emily amused all day, and no one to bother. Why don't I work?"

Sometimes, with Peter's divine-right-of-duty driving her to it, she would resist them, and stay at home to work. But work was always beyond her finger-tips, and she would sit and dream, and wonder interminably what they were doing—like a child left out of a party. What was Lou saying? How was Emily looking?

Darn it all, she loved them both—her delightful children!

Sometimes they left her completely, and swam out beyond her depth; sometimes they had strange wordless quarrels. Once they completely forgot her, when they stumbled on Richard Le Gallienne's "Answer to an Invitation", in a poetry anthology.

"What fools we were, dearest," Emily cried, painfully. "We had so much fire to play with, and we let it die!"

Lou tossed back his handsome head, and for once his debonair gesture revealed itself as a wince of hurt. Then they remembered Nancy, and laughed flippantly. But all afternoon Nancy was haunted by that dreadful moment of reality, when they were a baffled woman and a man, before an altar from which the god had fled.

## 2

"The first thing I want you to do, darling, when you get time from that precious work of yours, is to marry," Emily said surprisingly, one afternoon, while she and Nancy were writing letters in Emily's sitting room.

"Why, Em, I thought you only half believed in marriage for creative people." Nancy looked up with a laugh.

"Well, I don't know what I believe for other people, but I certainly do want you to marry young and start making something," she said earnestly. "Now that *is* rather quaint of me, isn't it.

"I've been so happy, at times in my life. But I wouldn't want it for you, dear. It's unsafe.

"You know, sometimes I wonder what I should have been like with a man—like your daddy, for instance. You know one person never can grow quite complete alone—just as one log never can burn by itself. It would have been so different! More real. You can't think what a terror this being not quite sure of your realness is. I want to be real, but it seems too late."

"Do you feel that way, too?" Nancy asked. "Why I feel that all the time—as though I were living in the same body with someone I couldn't talk to—someone I was continually betraying. I wonder if everyone feels like that? Mother, do you think?"

But Emily had gone back to her original theme.

"Nan, you don't care about Lou too much, do you?" she asked with quick embarrassment.

"Tell me about him, Nan. He likes you ever so much. He didn't tell me. That's one reason I know. And by the way he looks at you," Emily said.

"Does he? Well, I like him, too, in a way. It's upsetting, though, because I have him all catalogued in my mind, and then he says something that shows me he's classified all wrong," Nancy confessed with a youthful flush.

"Does he tell you how wicked he is, and how many times his heart has been broken? Does he tell you how fascinating the women of Java are, and does he quote Remy de Gourmont?" Emily asked, a little cynically.

"No, he tells me nothing like that. He tells me how simple he is, underneath all the sophistication."

"So he has discovered that?" Emily raised her eyebrows. "My dear, I'll tell you a secret it took me seventeen years to learn. All people are simple underneath. The woman who has the uncanny hold on a man is the woman who can call out that simple, trusting self, underneath the accumulations, and satisfy it."

"No man, no matter how worldly he may appear, is really cynical and disillusioned. We are all little children at heart, hoping for the best, and believing that by some miracle it will happen. If you can get at that phase of a man, you can be almost divine in your supremacy."

### 3

During the weeks that followed, Lou Dane claimed every available minute of Nancy's time. Sometimes Emily went with them on their jaunts, but more often she was busy when they invited her. They golfed together, and swam at the country club, went for long hikes through the hills, attended concerts and plays together. Lou was an ideal playmate. He found unflagging exhilaration in the fresh enjoyment Nancy brought to the things they did together.

Emily came in and curled up on Nancy's bed one night, as she was brushing her hair before retiring.

"Tell me some more about Lou," she commanded, watching the girl intently. "Are you happy with him, dear?"

"Very . . . . Do you think he's a good person for me to know, Emily?"

"Why, Nan? What do you mean?"

"Well, he's so sort of vital, Emily. Not like Stannie or the other boys I've ever known. I feel as though I were standing in a strong wind when I am with him. I feel as though I ought to resist it, some way. . . . Do you know what I mean? Do you think I should?"

"Do you mean, you're afraid you might care about him, dear?" Emily asked gently.

"Not definitely that, of course, but he's dangerously wonderful I think. Don't you?" Nancy was earnest now. She turned on her bench, doubling one knee under her, and drumming with the back of her silver brush upon the other one.

"Dangerously wonderful." Emily repeated the phrase thoughtfully. "Nothing is too wonderful to be, Nan. If you mean that it would make the rest of life flat for you when he went away, that is cowardice. That is the way most people run their little lives, my dear. They are afraid of happiness, so they make themselves little platitudes by which they console themselves for not accepting it. Don't do that, Nan. If you see wonder ahead, and you know in your heart that it is going to bring pain in its wake, don't dodge it. Live, my dear, with every fiber of yourself! Even God would rather have you return yourself to him battered, than mildewed. . . ."

"But, Emily, I have an instinct for safety that I cannot help. I feel horribly frightened of Lou Dane. I knew when I first looked at him that he had some



force in him that I had not met before."

"I know," Emily said shortly, "but there is no use in my telling you what it means, and what to do about it. You must decide for yourself, my dear. I know what I did, and I know what it did to me. I am satisfied. But I should not presume to advise you about it. You'll do what you want to in the end, anyway, and it's useless for me to clutter up your decision with my opinions. But don't be a coward, Nancy. I think that in your gallant little heart you would hate yourself for that worse than anything else in the end."

"You frighten me! You sound so terribly ominous to-night, Emily." Nancy shivered and tried to laugh.

"Well, I don't mean to. I'm just glad I'm here with you, and that I can be behind you whenever you need me," she said.

"But, Emily, will you tell me something, honestly?"

"Anything, I think, Nan."

"Do you care the slightest? Does it pain you, ever so little, for me to be with him now? Because if it does, my dear, I can see him never again, and it won't matter much. Nothing is worth hurting you about," Nancy said sincerely.

"No, my dear. I give you my word, it doesn't matter to me in the slightest. I'm only thinking about you, and what is going to make you happy," Emily said, rising to kiss Nancy good night, and then passing into her own room.

She sat by her window a long time before she slipped off her violet frock and got into bed.

"Perhaps I should take her to the mountains to-

morrow," she said to herself, as she pulled up the sweet pea tinted silk blankets around her slender body. "Oh, God, let me do the thing that will make her finer in the end!"



## *Chapter Twenty-eight*

### LOVE—AND OTHER LOVES

#### I

BUT the next morning there seemed no way of taking Nancy to the mountains. At breakfast a telegram came from Sylvia Williver, saying that her sister, Frances Renby, the actress, had read one of Nancy's plays and wanted one written for herself. Sylvia was bringing the actress from New York in two days, and she wanted to stay at the Chestnut Hill house, so she would have every opportunity to work with Nancy. It was the chance Emily had dreamed of securing for Nancy some day. It meant forgetting everything else for the moment. Both Emily and Nancy were beside themselves with joy.

In the interim before the guests arrived, Emily refused to let Nancy work at all.

"You must save all your energy, and be simply bursting with ideas by the time they come," she said. "We're all going to help you play so you'll be ready for work by next Monday."

Lou did his share in the helping, and Stannie was more than usually pathetic in his worship. He followed Nancy with his eyes wherever she went, and spoke to her in an awe-stricken voice.

"For mercy's sake, Stannie, don't be such a goof,"

Nancy said, when she had borne his silent adoration as long as she could.

Lou paid her no special homage. He made her forget herself completely, which may have been his intention, by making her remember only him.

Nancy had known but few men who could compete with her quaint, romantic partners in the scenes she often imagined for herself. One could hardly call Stannie—goggle-eyed, owl-minded Stannie, more interested in music than moonlight—a man, in the interesting sense of the word! And the boys at college—always so ready with current wise-cracks to cap any situation—hardly fitted Nancy's conception of intrigue.

At any rate, because Sally had given her a cinema mind to amuse herself in the midst of barren reality, she began playing with the idea of Lou.

He was so big, and so insolently graceful, so dark with the suns of tropic lands. The white of his teeth was a sudden italic in his face. About his clothes hung the aroma of salt and spices. He paved his conversation with sibilantly named cities. The world to him was merely a neighborhood. Fireflies reminded him of the little sampans twinkling with lanterns in the Chinese sea; Nancy's hair, he said, smelled like moonlight under a mimosa tree. He had known islands where men were vain about their curls, and where women tended cocoa trees, and cooked rice three times a day. He had been sealing in Newfoundland; had flirted with a shark in the waters off Java. He had idled on all the playgrounds of the world, and said he preferred golf with Emily and Nancy.

"Have you a great deal of money?" Nancy had asked him once.

"Amazingly little," he said, "but I know how to spend it. I buy nothing but hours with my money. Who wants to own bricks and diamonds? I'd rather buy a string of beautiful hours—some-place with some-one."

"And then some-place else, with some-one else," interposed Emily, lazily. Always that curious bitter hostility between them!

## 2

When she was away from him, Nancy wrote herself romantic dialogues, in which Lou's consciously thrilling voice made just the right answers. But when they played together, she was gruffly unresponsive to his cues.

"He's so used to having women make fools of themselves over him, here's one that won't," she told herself spuriously, "and he thinks I'm naive. Well, let him!"

Of course he did think so. But he thought she was other dear things too. Let Emily feel maternal about the curious quiet child. Damned if he could feel paternal!

He used to disconcert her woefully sometimes, by blatantly flirting with her.

"Don't *do* that, Golden! I've got two big, round sunburned disks on the back of my neck where you've been gazing at me," he said, turning suddenly to look at



Nancy. They were having lazy tea while he read aloud.

"I think you're pretty conceited," Nancy told him.

"I'm not, of course. But I ought to be," he said with a grin, "with youngsters like you paying me compliments every time you look at me."

"Hush, Lou," Emily commanded good-naturedly. "Stop teasing the child."

Eventually he did stop. And as he said less, he meant more.

As weeks went by he continued to commute in his Daimler between Chestnut Hill and the Yale Club, where he was living in Boston.

One day Emily didn't feel like golf. Nancy and Lou went alone to a course on the North Shore. At the third hole, they had forgotten they were playing, and wandered over to sit on a rock and regard the brilliant universe. Billows of downy clouds wandered down the tidy sky, like wisps of powder sifted over a blue-tiled bathroom. Midas-fingered goldenrod fanned lazily through steeped grasses. So desperately beautiful! Nancy was breathless with the delicious twoness of the day!

"Something about you," Lou said after a long silence. "You make me want to tell you all sorts of irrelevant things. I have a need for sincerity with you. Why is it?"

"I don't know. Have you?"

"I feel that ancient, masculine fallacy that if I told you many bewildering things they would be a little clearer to me. I want to be very simple with you. That

was the first thing I felt about you, I think." He knew he was making this up. Well, perhaps, it *was* true, only he'd never bothered to notice it.

"Little simple things are beautiful, I think to myself. Geraniums in earthy pots, loaves of fresh bread from an oven, and folk songs played on a piano, slightly out of tune. You know what I mean?" He looked to see how she was looking.

She nodded, transfixed.

"I'm so tired of sophistication, my dear," he exclaimed, and meant it, then. "Subtle silks and curious jewels and fugitive romances! I'm fed up with perfumes from remote places, and paintings with baffling beauty, and talk spiced with bitterness and wisdom. I want gingham, and sliced peaches, and conversation that is genuine and unafraid."

At this Nancy laughed. "And here I have been striving so hard for just that! For months and months I have been poking into all sorts of unhappiness, because it seemed so much more dramatic than just contentment. I have been exploring complexities because I was saturated with simplicity."

"Don't do it, dear child. If you know a place where you can find simple things and happy people, you'd better rush back as fast as you can go. Sophistication is a germ that gets a terrible hold on you. It spoils the wholesome things, unless you've suffered so much with the disease, as I have, that you're sick for the other thing."

"I wish you could know my mother," Nancy said. "She would be good for you, I think. She is the only

thoroughly happy person I've ever seen in the whole world."

"Your mother?"

"She's so beautiful," began Nancy. "She has a funny little, homely face, but it seems to have a sort of light behind it. Really. Why, I've seen people she didn't even know stop suddenly at sight of Mother's face. We get in the habit of thinking that all wonderful people must be big and important. But there are wonderful small people, too . . . like my mother." Nancy stopped, in passionate embarrassment.

"Is she like you?" he encouraged, as she paused. "No, she can't be. You could never be thoroughly happy, my dear. You are too delicate an instrument for happiness to play upon continuously. Happiness demands a certain complacency, a certain blunt acceptance of the balancing of things. You have too keen perception into the changeable meaning of things to have them balance for you. You will know only snatches of ecstasy in your life—never tranquil happiness."

She felt a sudden alienation between them, the first she had ever known with this man. "I can never explain to him," she told herself, "but if only he could catch what I mean. Somehow I know that is important between us." But she heard her lips talking on.

"I should rather," she was saying, "I should rather know ecstasy, heartbreakingly keen for a few hours, and then know despair, and keep those hours like a splash of vermillion in a dark box, to be peeped at occasionally and then hidden away."

She looked at him for confirmation. But he had offered her the solace of his infallible profile. He was gazing out to sea with a curious twist about his inscrutable mouth.

Surely, here was life, at last!

## 3

What dear danger he had become! She was panicky and restless with suspended drama. If only she could get him out of her thoughts. Of course she wasn't in love with him. He simply tantalized her with his kaleidoscopic mind. She told herself that many, many times.

"It's simply that I'm not used to grown-up men," she said to herself primly, overlooking the dozen men-friends of Emily's and her own. Granite beside flame, they seemed now, mere uncolored clods beside all the vivid glory she had known must be *somewhere* in the world. What on earth could she do, now she had found it? So inaccessible, and so tarnished!

"But I know it isn't love. It's just infatuation. I'll spend lots of time with him, and get quite cured." But she knew it for the ruse it was.

"You missed me, didn't you?" he said when he came back after a two day absence. "I missed you too, Golden. Thought I'd civilized myself past missing anyone."

"Have you tried to?" she asked inanely, busy with her thirsty eyes on that sweet-sulky face.

"That's been my code, you know," he laughed.

"Ask Emily. Emily says I'm the only perfect philosopher in the world. Because I always know there's something just as wonderful around the corner."

"But that's so impermanent," Nancy protested. "Corner after corner, all your life. And nothing that is really your own."

"Of course it is. But the right to impermanence is the one compensation I have for being deprived of . . . you, for instance. And the things that would go with you." He was suddenly serious. That was when he was nicest—when his eyes took a vacation from merriment.

"That's why it is such sweet pain for me to be with you, child. Because you make me want the permanent things so badly. You make me primitive, somehow—so primitive I'd like to have an ugly little suburban home with a kitchen garden in the back yard. I'd be willing to shovel snow off the walk in winter, and sift the ashes. You'd write verses for the local paper, be the president of the Ladies' Literary Society. I'd belong to the Elks. I could find it all worth while with you."

"Don't say things like that," she said sternly. "To-day they may be true to you. But they aren't, really. We'd bore each other in a week." (*Oh, I'd love you more every day!*)

"I'd be remembering I had a chance to write a great play for Frances Renby someday, and you'd be remembering a glade you knew in Australia where scarlet orchids are like motionless birds in the air on a moonlight night." (*Oh, if you were only poor and stupid, and mine!*)



"Probably," he agreed, "probably, I'll forget you next year, and write to Em to find out your name, so I can send you a Christmas card."

"And I'll show it to Em and say 'For heaven sake, who is this Lou Dane?'"

Unless—oh, unless! That brave blind world that saves the world from chaos—that door in every wall—that key to every door locked on shifting paradise!

## 4

Of course it couldn't go on forever.

There had to be the last day of more than mere friendliness. She had heard it tiptoeing stealthily down the future to meet her, nearer and nearer.

To Lou it was a strange miracle.

Love that might come true! Was there such a thing? Deep in his little-boy heart, under all its Pierrot trappings, was an incongruous faith that somewhere there was *something*. Of course it hadn't any right to be true for him. He was a hostage to the hate of that far-away Evelyn he had never understood.

What a mess life was sometimes! But surely not to-day. To-day was that first day of his perennial springtime. He had known young days like this—everything new and unexplored. Full days later, extravagantly overladen with love. Tired days, then, with dismal leaves falling one by one from his tree of love, and his thoughts flying silently to another South. Then brief Winter, waiting, bare, for Spring again.

Over and over, how many seasons had his heart

seen? He never bothered to count them. Would that go on forever—a tired parade of love until the end? And Evelyn, unthroned tyrant, clinging to her power. Why had he been such a vagabond in love? He wished he had been a respected citizen, smug and substantial. Was it too late? Perhaps, if Evelyn . . . . No use going over *that* again.

## 5

Then Frances Renby came, a shallow, petulant woman, vain of her physical beauty, and quite overbearing. She took a violent dislike to Emily, who did everything possible to make her welcome and comfortable in her home. Nancy, however, she liked intensely, because the girl found it necessary to flatter her frequently in their discussions.

The first week they spent together, riding—Frances on Emily's nervous little mare, and Nancy astride her own superb black horse—going to matinees, and attending the various functions given in the actress' honor. When she said she wanted Nancy to study her thoroughly, she meant that she wanted to see herself through the sensitive girl's flattering young eyes. She was avid for compliments, and made Nancy comment on every bit of her conversation, and on every impression she attempted to make on the people who saw her.

"She's a nasty little peacock! What she wants is a talking mirror instead of a playwright," Emily declared scornfully. But Nancy was more lenient.

"I know how she feels. Her personal charm is her stock-in-trade, and of course, she feels differently about it from what most women do. She wants to be sure I understand all her good points, so I can give her ample opportunity to display them in her play. Don't you mind, dear. It rather amuses me."

Every afternoon she went to her studio and made notes for the new play. She hadn't hit upon just the tone she wanted, as yet.



## Chapter Twenty-nine

### A LITTLE HOUSE DECIDES

#### 1

Now first snow had come, sifting down like confetti through the dawn. A gala guest suddenly arrived with an invitation to come out and play again. Everyone under sixty felt ten years younger, looking out the window on the first snow.

That made Lou an appropriate age to play truant with Nancy.

"Couldn't you just come away with me?" Lou suggested over the telephone.

"And forget my play? That would be rather dreadful, don't you think?" she asked, for the sheer bliss of being persuaded. "But it is *such* a day, isn't it? Where'll we go?"

"Does it matter?" he asked boldly. Her dear clear voice!

"How too marvelous," she cried to herself, deciding what to wear. Long, lovely to-day. And no worrying over to-morrow.

"We'll be the gayest things," she promised, by way of instructing her heart that it was to be left at home with its face in a corner, like a bad little girl.

They took Lou's car and drove through Cambridge, past Arlington, and on to the Concord Road. So happy, with no past and no future!

Everyone seemed possessed of the carnival spirit; children were wild with delight, bunny-mittened and wrapped in scarves. It was like a Christmas postcard come to life, Nancy thought, watching two little boys rolling a giant snowball down a hill.

Little houses were doubly cozy, shut in by the snow. One could imagine the snug, coffee-scented warmth of them now, at noontime, with the children trooping home from school, and little mothers, busy and important in their little domains. How nice life is, really, when you get down to it!

"Wish we were never coming back," said Lou boyishly, glancing at Nancy, cuddled down in her furs beside him. She smiled an absent smile and nodded her bright little head. The crisp tulip petals of her sunny hair were meek and decorous under her little distance-colored felt. She was so *right*, he thought. Well, damn it all, he was right too! It was their confounded circumstances that were wrong. Well, let's change them.

"It's just his nearness," she was thinking, "and that Pagliacci pathos of his profile that affects me this way. I wish I weren't so plebeianly concerned with safety and a future, and what not."

They passed a quite perfect house, guarded by proper young junipers and shuttered with *creme de menthe* green. It could have been an illustration to a fairy tale, or a real estate booklet—except that no one was living happily ever after in it, for a huge crude sign hung on its arched gate:



“For Sale

See Ben White, Insurance”

They stopped the car and looked at the house longingly. “Now there’s romance worked out to its logical disillusion for you,” said Lou. “Somebody surely thought that was love’s young dream come true.”

“Oh, don’t, please,” Nancy protested. “Don’t strike a house when it’s down.” But both their faces were tender when they drove on.

In the town, Lou stopped the car and went into a drugstore. A white-coated youth came to the door, pointing down a little street to the left.

“Ben White’s house,” Lou exclaimed briefly, when he got back into the car.

But Ben was serving on the jury, said the lean New England woman who answered his knock.

“Ain’t it good to see this snow?” she asked. “Seemed like we wasn’t ever goin’ to get any more proper weather. ’Tain’t healthy, the warm kind of weather we been having.

“Tell you what. If you really want to see that Williams house, I’ll give you the key, and if you’ve a mind to, you can go right along yourself and look it over.”

“That would be great,” Lou told her.

“’D like to go along with you myself, but I’m giving the young-uns their dinner jest now,” Mrs. White said.

The inside of the house was all the exterior promised. The ghosts of quiet old rooms stared at them beseechingly from shuttered windows. Slats of sunshine were little scatter rugs about the floor. Their two shad-

ows were huge and fuzzy, in the dimness.

"Well, hang up your hat, Mrs. Crusoe," said Lou, standing in front of a fireplace, and warming his hands at a phantom fire.

"Oh, it's sweet, isn't it?" she whispered, looking in closets happily.

"Let's move in," he said. "Let's be somebody else forever and ever—just you and me. Let's forget all the people we ever knew. Want to?"

"All right," she agreed laughing. But she saw there was no laughter in his eyes, and pretended not to see. "All right, who'll we be? Mr. and Mrs. Crusoe?"

"And I'd come home at night. . . ."

"And I'd have made a cake. . . ."

"Such a cake. More like a poem, really."

"And you'd forget the evening papers."

"We'd never have time for papers. I'd just have time to look at you in a gingham dress."

"Well, if we were, we'd never notice it. . . ."

"And we'd be poor. May we be poor, please?"

"And we'd never speak to the neighbors."

"Never, never, for fear they'd call. For we'd never have time for calls. Life is only so long. We'd only have about fifty years together if I lived to be ninety . . . . Oh, Nancy!" he whispered her name suddenly, and there was such a frightened look in his eyes, she quite forgot herself and came and stood beneath his chin and put her arms around his waist. They were two children consoling each other for a broken bubble.

"Oh, Lou, how simply awful," she whispered, tilting back her head to meet his down-bent face. Their

single shadow made a pantomime of yearning.

"I've tried so hard," he said. "Have you?"

"Don't let's talk about it, dear. I'm still trying," she said unsteadily. "You'd better kiss me, though. Will you please?"

He picked her off her feet, and kissed her one long kiss. She had meant to study this first kiss . . . stars and blankness and delirium of joy. But all she knew about it, when it came, was that it was the most alarmingly intrusive thing that had ever happened to her. Surely that wasn't what people meant by kissing! His mouth was trembling. Lord, how she loved his mouth. I'll take that kiss up later, she thought. Right now I'm loving him.

"You precious . . . I've wanted you all my life, I think," he said at last. "I've been homesick for you always, Golden." She yearned over him with a passion of tenderness, kissing his chin and the baffled humorous mouth . . . murmuring little meaningless endearments to him.

"Oh, I love you, darling. . . . I've loved you such a long time I think."

"Have you really, child? How do you know?" he questioned, with his lips against her eyebrow.

"Oh, I know," she said.

He put his arm about her and led her into the lonely little kitchen, where he lifted her, to sit upon the built-in kitchen cabinet.

"Oh, you're sweet . . . your voice! I'd have loved that even if I'd hated you," she said extravagantly, "and your hair, dearest, that white patch. I

love that outrageously." He kissed her pulsing, warm hands.

"Oh, my cake . . . it's burning black!" she cried in a moment, and jumped from her perch to snatch open the oven door in busy despair. "Badness . . . you ruin my housekeeping."

But in the midst of playing, the pathos of their game overcame them.

"Oh . . . darling. . . ." And they clung together again, suddenly realizing that cakes and kitchens could never be for them.

"What *will* we do?" she asked holding him close.

"Well, we'll do something." But in his heart he knew there was nothing to be done. It was so devilish. He hated life. Why had he gotten this child mixed up in that ever-widening web?

"You're sure it isn't just a game we're playing?" she questioned. "The snow . . . this little house. Houses are so potent, you know. I wonder if you do care about me. . . . I never thought you did."

"Honey, I've always been scared to death of you. You're the first woman in the world I've ever been scared of—honestly."

Always before women had been able to look after themselves. But he knew this gallant child would play the game recklessly, and lose her whole stake if need be.

"Oh, I wish I were different. I wish I were just a callow youngster with nothing behind me. What we'd do to life, then, you and I!"

"I wouldn't have you different . . . not a cell of you," she cried passionately.

It was hopeless. He could never make her understand. Just cling together and let their hands and faces love each other for a little while. Time for sense later.

"We must go, dear," she said at last. "Mrs. White will be looking for us."

They locked the door solemnly. They could not bear to leave this suddenly-beloved godmother of a house.

"I'll buy it for you and send it to you," Lou promised.

"What is a house to me, without you?" she whispered earnestly. "Oh, Lou, we've got to think of something."





## *Chapter Thirty*

### LIFE LAUGHS LAST

#### I

NEVER a morning like that morning. Nancy woke to a dazzle of nameless delight like triumphant music. That marvelous Something that life had been promising her since the day she was born had happened at last! And it was so much better than the promise!

Sun came streaming through her lilac curtains and over her fragrant bed. The dingy-wigged doll she had brought from home stretched out scarred arms with a compassionate smirk. Everything looked different to-day. She wanted to laugh, and sing, and turn somersaults, perhaps, like a child in holiday ecstasy.

Then she began soberly to contemplate the magnitude of her love. She tried to measure it by all the things she had ever known. Everything paled, she told herself.

She wished she could snatch her Lou from a burning building. She wished she could swim with him from a shipwreck! For him she'd choke a snake with her bare hands. She loved him with all the fire of Helen, of Iseult, of Sappho. . . . The love of all the mothers in the world for all the little boys.

She'd live with him in a tent on the desert; in an igloo made of Greenland ice. She'd live with him in

a shack by a railroad track, if that were necessary. She'd trim the kerosene lamps, she'd even feed chickens, and cajole from them eggs for his sunshiny omelettes.

She'd do anything, in fact—if she could just have him. If she only didn't have to share him with the pattern of their present life! If they could just retire together into the ether, he and she on an invisible island of love! Nobody else in their world—a tete-a-tete with eternity!

Well, that was just childish, of course. She'd better snap right out of that. For they most certainly lived in a world, and a crowded and complicated world, they'd find it; what with that mythical Evelyn, not to mention implacable Daddy and Mother. It *was* a crowd, when you got to counting them up.

She hurried into Emily's room, and found her lying among the sweet pea blankets, asleep, with her snowy hair spread like costly lace around her.

"Wake up, Emily, and assure me that it's nice to be alive," Nancy whispered, bending over to kiss her. The dark, hilarious eyes opened suddenly, and smiled with their audacious confidence.

"What'd you say, dear? Is it late?" Emily propped herself on one elbow and looked at her little gold clock on the night table. "Why, it's not even seven!"

"I woke up, and I didn't want to think," Nancy said, sitting on the side of the bed in her nightgown—more like colored light than silk.

"Oh, darling! What a dreadful way to wake up! You should wake up primed to your precious eyebrows

with wanting to think," Emily reproved her fondly. "Tell me about it, Nan."

"It's happened. The wind has blown me off my feet, Emily," the girl said, twisting a turquoise ribbon with her fingers. "The dangerous wonder came too near—yesterday."

Emily sat up in bed, throwing her white hair back impatiently.

"So you love him? And of course he loves you. Well, what about it? I didn't want it to happen, because I know what a conscience you have, and what a tragically final way you have of considering love. But it *has* happened. Aren't you happy? Doesn't it make life delicious this morning?"

"Yes, I'm happy. But I'm dreadfully sad too, because I know it isn't going to fit in. I can't be loving him in a shabby, secret way, Emily. I could never do that, you know. So I must get over it, mustn't I?"

"Look here, Nan." Emily took her two hands and held them, palms upward on the sweet pea covers. "You aren't a child. A wax flower has no particular value, except that it looks like a real one, and will never wilt. But that doesn't mean that you'd choose a wax rose, if you could have a real one, does it? And it doesn't mean, either, that you'd refuse to enjoy a real rose, because it couldn't last forever. Can't you see that this love of yours and Lou's is something like that?"

"I'm sorry it has happened, because you are so afraid of it. But now that it has, my dear, throw back your head and enjoy it. Take it, and make the most beauti-

ful thing you can from it. Don't judge it by shabby standards, and don't blaspheme it by thinking of it as guilty. Love as gloriously as you can for a little while, and you'll never be sorry," Emily cried, with passion.

"This is so different . . . so different from what they'd say . . . almost anyone else in the world," Nancy faltered.

"Of course it is different, because you are different, and Lou is different. The ordinary ones have their little rules to go by. If you can be big enough about it, you may make your own rules," Emily said. Then she drew Nancy close and kissed her. "I never meant to say these things to you, child, but I believe them truly. My life has been paradoxical. It has looked happy from the outside, in the spots that were not happy, and the high moments I cherish in my own soul have been the things that people have pitied me for. I wonder if most lives aren't like that? No one can set your standards for you. You must make your own, just as though no one had ever lived in the world before you.

"My standard has been that the only sin possible is to stunt your own, or someone else's growth. I have taken my happiness wherever I found it, and made no excuses for the taking!"

Nancy was assured more by Emily's confidence than by her logic. "Darling Emily; she never lets me down," she murmured gratefully.

To-day she would just be happy in her new treasure. And later, when she was feeling very adult, she'd decide just what she'd better do. There seemed no ques-

tion of tragic renunciation. There was a way out . . . there always was. Well, they'd simply find it!

With the imperious confidence that comes from living twenty-one years in a world that reserves the privilege of laughing last, she knew she could arrange everything.

## 2

When Nancy saw Lou that morning, all the futile bickering in her mind dissolved. Fitting in seemed so ridiculously unimportant beside the wild love she knew for this man. She could not even remember what it was she had said to herself so sanely while she was alone.

"There is nothing else," he whispered, half guessing what she was thinking. "I have been reasoning all night with myself; I hold you in my arms this morning; and I know there is nothing else."

"I know." Her old expression, learned from Sally, unconsciously. "Afterwards, we will remember those wise little things we said to ourselves alone, but now they have no sense," she said languidly.

All morning she had been in a dream about him; now she was suddenly alive. She wanted to tell him everything she had ever thought; she wanted to hear everything about him. It seemed too ghastly that they had known things apart. She thought of her busy growing-up and wondered how she had ever borne the loneliness without him. She thought of him graduating



from college, and she not there; swimming at dawn in a southern sea, and she playing with dolls under a tree, unable to protect him from sharks, and sunstroke. She thought of other women loving his straight, proud throat, reading their fair or stormy weather in his barometric eyes, and she far away—having measles, perhaps.

"You know, I'll never let you go again," she told him irrelevantly, while they were lunching.

He looked up and smiled detachedly and then returned to the menu from which he was ordering luncheon. Funny child!

"What's this about never letting me go?" he asked, when the waiter had been disposed of. But she was shy now.

"What sweet little shades on these lamps," she said.

"So you're happy," he remarked. "Well, honey child, you're not half as happy as I am." He wished it were true. It would be, too, if he could just stop the buzzing of that little mosquito, conscience.

"Shall we be just happy to-day, or shall we talk about our troubles?" he asked whimsically.

"Let's be happy. We'll work them all out after, dearest. I know there must be a way. Don't you?" He wondered if she was really as confident as she sounded.

In her heart, she was beginning to be a little afraid, so she assured him doubly that it could be done. That woman who stood between her and Lou was so clever, so worldly-wise. Heavens, if Emily hadn't been able



to defeat that legendary Evelyn, surely little Nancy could never conquer her!

"The street is best after all," she said. "Let's hurry and finish luncheon so we can go out on the street. I can at least pat your arm there."

"But I can see only the top of your smart little hat, unless we forget ourselves and stop on the corner to kiss, as we almost did coming up Beacon Street."

"I wish we were just two little pigeons," she said a little later, as they were crossing the Common. "Look at them, so frankly making love, chasing each other about and whispering. We could kiss and kiss, and never worry about anything." She watched the happy pigeons, dozens of them, preening and parading, handsome males tiptoeing in circles around drab, homely little females.

"Is it true that pigeons are—what's that word that rhymes with monotonous and means only one love at a time?" Nancy asked, watching.

"Monogamous? It's commonly believed to *be* monotonous," Lou laughed, "but I am willing to try it."

This shocked Nancy a little. Not too good taste, she thought, primly. But she laughed, nevertheless, because she didn't want Lou to think *anything* shocked her.

"Look at this fat old panhandler after peanuts, shamelessly telling you he has a sick wife and ten children to feed." Lou pointed with his stick. The fat pigeon grumbled with indignation.

They walked through the Gardens, and Nancy tried to tell Lou about that first, adventuresome day in Bos-

ton, when everything had seemed burgeoning with meaning. But when she tried to put it into words, the romance leaked away. After all it had been nothing but a walk!

Down Boylston Street they strolled, looking in windows gaily. Nancy saw themselves reflected in every eye they passed, so gloriously romantic looking. Lou quite set-apart-from-mere-men, by his tall grace, his drawling voice, the bold assurance of his manner. She herself, better dressed than other people, exquisite and rare with her Pinet slippers, her beaver jacket and the brief swagger skirt of her orange-brown velvet that just matched her hair. Really, they *were* worth turning to look at, Lou with his lignum-vitae stick and she with the corsage of hothouse pansies that came from Heaven knows where. She hoped her happy vanity wasn't the warning to the platitudinous fall.

"Oh, I am so proud of us," she thought, "so sheer voluptuously vain about our good looks and our radiance. If Mother were only walking along the other side of the street to see us! How she would adore us!"

"I'm glad we're us," she told Lou exuberantly.

"I'm rather glad myself, Beautiful," he said, chuckling.

### 3

Nancy wanted to tell everyone she met during those enchanted days. She wanted to pour it all out to Mother and Daddy, but she knew she never could. Funny little Mother and Daddy! She could not think

of them and their bread-and-milk simplicity in the same thought with Lou—so strange and yet so familiar.

Between the times she saw him, she became uncontrollably shy about him. Surely, she must have imagined all the beautiful things he told her. Could he possibly love her? Why, she was nothing but an ignorant youngster, red-haired, if you please, and shy, working rather incongruously on a play for a glamorous actress. Her daddy was a mechanic; her mother undeniably said "ain't" under stress of emotion. Surely not Nancy Lauren! She remembered Roy, whom she had never seen and for whom she had grieved because his letters were so beautiful and he was the lover of some other girl. Probably a little, weak-faced insurance salesman! And now she had this glorious being, this white-browed man with the poignant voice and the tingling hands. Other women had loved him; but now he was hers forever and ever!

By February the play was finished, and Frances Renby had gone triumphantly back to New York. She felt Nancy had written an unusual play, and one that would certainly attract attention. It was the story of a woman who had the courage to make a glory out of an outlaw love. It was remarkable, she said, that a girl of Nancy's youth and precedent could have imagined such a character. . . .

Lou had been wonderful to her while she was working. It helped to have him near, while she worked, and he came and watched her from the deep armchair beside the fireplace, hours on end. All the rest of her

life, Nancy remembered those weeks, when Lou's love had been a sort of barricade around her.

He never asked her to read him parts of the play, and if she looked up and saw his patient, twisted smile and level eyes smiling at her, and began suddenly to shuffle over her papers and read him some lines, he made little comment.

"You don't understand that, without knowing the rest, do you?" she asked, absent-mindedly. "You can't tell much about it, can you?"

"Only that it is beautifully done, my dear," he said.

Sometimes when she was tired, and the work was not going well, he opened his arms, and held her as tenderly as though she had been a child. His long cool fingers stroked her forehead rhythmically, and sometimes he sang little crooning lullabies to her, in Spanish, or Italian—or old American darky melodies. Once, curled up on his knees, with her head nestled against his heart, she fell asleep.

Emily was frankly amazed by his quiet devotion.

"It is touching to see you so humble, my dear. I love it in you. But it seems hardly you to me," she told him one night, when he brought Nancy home from a drive along the shore.

"It is hardly I, you see. It is an I no one has ever known before, because I have never loved anyone as I love Nancy," he explained with unconscious cruelty.

Stannie hated him for his privileges, and Emily herself was a little jealous, because Nancy found him so comforting during this difficult period.

"You've always said you couldn't have anyone in

the room with you while you were working, Nan. I should think he'd drive you crazy, mooning around all day and not doing anything at all," she said.

"Oh, no. It's sweet to have him there," Nancy replied.

Sweet it certainly was, but it brought Nancy no nearer to solving her problem.

"You are becoming so necessary to me, dearest! What shall I do when you are gone?" she said one day.

"As long as I am necessary I shall never go," he told her earnestly. "Maybe forever? I'm superstitious about promises, but something in me tells me that we could be happy forever like this. You know it?"

"Don't let's think about it, Lou! I know only that I am happy with you now, and that nothing else matters much to me," she said, kissing him.

"But, oh, my dear, if you would only let me show you how much happier we could be! Perhaps you will be brave enough some time to let me take you away, where we can belong to each other for the rest of our lives? Happiness must have some future, my dear, and ours is only a bubble now, hanging in mid-air."

"But that is what you told me, once upon a time. If one could take the happy hours while they last and not bother about the future—that, you said, was the secret of ecstasy."

"It is, in most things. But not in this. This is different, my Nancy. I knew almost as little of life as you did, when I told you that. It was true of all the other happiness I have ever known, but not this, some way. This I want to make secure, because I know that if it ends there will be nothing left."





## *Chapter Thirty-one*

### PEOPLE WILL TALK

#### I

FROM Evelyn's lawyer in New York came the news that Evelyn had no intention of forfeiting her right to punish. Evelyn was visiting for a few months in New York. Nancy couldn't believe her refusal possible.

"She simply can't," she exclaimed in amazement. "Why, no one could hang on to a silly old spite, if she knew it was going to mean unhappiness to other people." But Lou tried to tell her how adamant Evelyn was.

"Why, that can't mean I'm not going to marry you," Nancy said, wide-eyed. She hadn't entertained the possibility for a moment. "Lou, what will we do? Can't we do something?"

Lou got angry. "Can't I do something? My God, haven't I tried? There isn't anything to do. You'll just have to forget me. I'm not worth your being unhappy about, anyway."

"Now, that's just silly," Nancy scolded in motherly fashion, putting her arm about his neck and kissing his sullen mouth. "Such nonsense! I'd think you were ten years old." She shook him gently.

"Well, I mean it. We shouldn't have gotten into this. I knew all the time it couldn't be straightened out," he muttered hopelessly.



"Well, it will be—so there," Nancy said determinedly, pulling him down beside her on the divan and putting his head on her shoulder. "I'll just go away and live with you someplace, and we'll forget all about the wedding business."

He sat up and looked at her, then threw back his head and whooped with mirth. "You funny! I can't think of anything much funnier than you deciding to be unconventional."

He stopped laughing and looked at her from the tops of his eyes. He fluttered her supple fingers in his long hands. "You don't know what you're talking about, honey," he said quietly.

"I think I do," Nancy replied, star-eyed. "I can't really see what difference it makes. We could belong to each other just as much, and after all marriage vows are really for people who can't think things through for themselves."

She was amazed that this argument came to her complete, from nowhere. She had never thought about it until this moment. But now she knew she believed it, since it meant Lou to her. She'd believe in Buddhism, if it meant Lou.

"What would you tell your family? It can't be done, darling."

Of course Mother and Daddy *were* the rub.

"Well, why couldn't we just elope, and send them a telegram from somewhere saying we'd been married in some little town or other?" Apparently Nancy had planned many elopements without benefit of a justice of the peace. But she was desperately earnest about it all.

"No. It's simply silly to think about it," he said almost angrily. "It's impossible. And the sooner you forget me the better for everyone."

For everyone? Perhaps he didn't really want to bother, after all. That was probably it. She drew herself up haughtily; then crumpled into tears.

"Oh, honey, don't. Come here." Lou gathered her into his arms, and she curled up in them like a baby.

"Oh, Lou, you don't care, you really don't," she sobbed.

"You little idiot, can't you *see*? I'm about crazy. I think I didn't close my eyes last night, trying to think out a way. I never cared about anything before in my life," he said huskily. He had a conviction that, sooner or later, he'd simply take the child by the hand and disappear with her.

"I want you so, I've forgotten all the sane things I ever thought. I just want you. I'll promise anything. I'm not a boy. I know life. I can make you happier than you ever dreamed."

But she interrupted. "Let us make no promises, Lou. I shall go for a week, or a month, or a year, or forever, and we shall see what happens," she said with a curious dignity.

"Oh, my dearest, that is enough! Because I know that this is something that was written to be from the beginning of the earth," he said humbly.

In a month he was sailing for South America, and Nancy decided to go home for a visit, before she met him in New York.

Emily was considerate and tender with her. When

she told her that she had made her choice, Emily kissed her and said quietly, "I know you can keep it beautiful and proud, dear. Love can be anything you make it, and I am sure yours is going to be glorious."

"But whatever shall I tell Mother and Daddy?" Nancy worried. "I never could make them understand, and if they didn't understand, it would break their angel hearts. What shall I tell them?"

"No. You never could make them see it as you do. It *would* break their hearts. Can't you tell them you're going to collect material for a new play, Nan? You can be vague about it. They'll accept anything you say, you know."

"That's the wicked part. They will never suspect. Oh, I hate all this, Emily. Remember what you told me about the man like Daddy, whom you loved? You said you were afraid to drag your love through all the adjustment, for fear there wouldn't be anything left of it. Suppose there is nothing left of ours, after it is dragged through everything?" Nancy was tragic.

"That was different. That love of mine would have hurt other people. This one of yours will upset no one's life, except your own, possibly. And that belongs to you," Emily said reassuringly.

Nancy used to wake in the night to the stark strangeness of what she was planning to do. She'd lie straight and chill in the cold moonlight, realizing what she was planning.

Daddy would die some day, and she could never come home again. She could never write them gay little letters; they could never send her odd little pres-

ents; Mother could never again tell people how wonderful she was. And every place they went—Lou and she—nasty whispers would make footprints about their house. If they had a baby . . . . and she wanted a sweet little Lou . . . . that would be even more terrible.

“Wonder what people will call me? Not Mrs. Dane, of course. Then what? Perhaps they’ll call me Miss Dane. Oh, I don’t believe I can do it . . . . too many nasty little details to bother about. Passports and things. I wish we could just love like children, with Emily to take care of us forever.” But she knew she really didn’t wish that.

She remembered that blurred picture of Angela’s mother—the wife of the shoemaker. She remembered Mother whispering; Mrs. Kelly grinning with righteous sanctity over the drab elopement of the little Italian woman with some unnamed lover. Up and down Second Street the story had gone—talked over in the brittle way that people talk about outlaw romance.

Nancy remembered the somber eyes of Angela’s mother, her eager little breast under the scarlet calico, her soft, impatient voice, singing rebelliously while she brooded. Maybe that very night that Nancy had seen her, she had been planning to run away. Wasn’t it the same story—Nancy’s exalted love and daring, translated in terms of this primitive long-ago drama? Nancy wondered why she had remembered that pitiful episode all these years. Could it be that fate shows you a miniature of your own big situation some time, and lets you interpret it, unbiased by your great wanting?

Nancy wondered if Angela's mother had been happy, in some simple way. If she ever guessed the blight her going had meant to Mike and the children? Did the talking matter to Angela's mother? Surely people talking could not matter much to you when you were barricaded all about by your love. But to those erstwhile loves shut out from the barricade, the talking most certainly mattered. Oh, it was all so confusing. . . .

All the way from New England to Virginia, Nancy tried to fit Lou into a scheme of living that included Daddy and Mother. Even if Lou were free to marry her, even if Daddy and Mother could know about their life together, would it be possible to blend these three dear people, Daddy, Mother and Lou, into one pattern?

She tried to imagine how Lou would seem to Mother and Daddy. What kind of a man was he, after all, if you could look at him without the glamour of your love for him?

They had so little time to talk of anything but love. Nancy felt sometimes as though she'd like to *know* Lou. You *can't* know a man very well, when you love him so much. She wished she were a boy, so she could spend the night with him at his club, talking into the dawn. She'd like to know what he thought about God—if anything. And if he liked women to have their independence. She wondered if he was "old-fashioned" about marriage, and hoped he was, and vowed she'd make him be. She wondered if he was a Republican or a Democrat, and which she was herself; if he liked

Baudelaire, or thought him mouldy; if he hated picnics; if he liked pepper on his cantaloupe, and salt on his grapefruit; if he had any chronic ailments, or suffered from insomnia. So many vital things she didn't know about her love! And there was never time to find out, with all of Emily's friends continually bothering them.

"Dear me, these are the things I should have asked about before I fell in love with him. Well, there's never seemed to be any time. I can't seem to remember what I used to think about before I thought about Lou."





## *Chapter Thirty-two*

### LIARS' LULLABY

#### 1

**H**AY bent with the wind, and rose and swayed and bent again, rhythmically. Occasionally there was the hot rasp of a cricket from the orchard. The hum of Peter's mower as he drove up and down, conquering the undulating grass, was insistent.

Nancy drove the hay rake behind Peter, leaving fragrant, straggling mounds of grass in her wake. The rake creaked metallically when she stepped on the foot lever and raised the circular prongs to drop the gathered bundle of grass. Up and down she drove, urging lazy old Sam when he stopped sometimes to nibble; wheeling awkwardly at the corners, and raising the rake with a creak, as she came to a bundle. She could hear Peter singing an old darky song, every time he stopped at the end of a row and raised the blades to turn. She, herself, sang as she drove lazily up and down. It was good to be plodding up and down, under the big straw hat that extended over her shoulders, in the warm smell of the grass under the sun. So far away from Frances Renby, with her black and silver cigarettes, and her whiny voice, and rancid philosophies! What was it Lou had said that afternoon on the cliff? Gingham and fresh bread from the oven. This was what he meant.

She had locked Lou up in a little box and left it in her trunk, packed for South America and standing in Emily's house, waiting to be shipped when she sent word. She thought of him as seldom as she could, these days. She felt poignantly simple and tranquil, here with Sally and Peter.

As she turned her rake at the end of a row, she saw Sally coming down the road, wearing a hat like her own, with a high peaked crown that made her dear, dumphy body a grotesque pyramid. She had a tin pail on her arm, and a plate covered with a fresh blue-bordered napkin.

"I brought you some iced tea and cookies, honey. Hadn't you better come in and cool off awhile? No sense of you wearin' yourself out," Sally said, pouring the amber tea into a tin cup and handing the small plate of spice cookies up to Nancy on the rake.

"You don't know how good this is for me, dear," Nancy said, her mouth full of cooky. "I feel so peaceful and *good* up here, jogging along behind old Sam."

"I s'pose so," Sally agreed vaguely, "but seems to me it'd be more of a rest for you to lie in the hammock and sorta read or something." She squinted up at her child in the sun. Her face was puckered with things she could not say.

After the hay was raked and piled into huge mounds, Nancy and Peter drove the wagon around, collecting them. Peter tossed big forkfuls into the air, not very expertly, and Nancy packed them into the wagon, standing high on the unsteady heap, with the wind

whipping her gingham frock about her limbs. A long, golden barley stalk was held between her lips.

"What do you think about, Daddy, working out here all day?" she asked idly.

"Same's you," Peter said, heaving a wind-blown pom-pom up to the wagon. Then, loving his words, he went on:

"Oh, I think about what fools people are to sell themselves day-in-and-day-out to workin' for somebody else, when they could come out to a place like this. In a year in town you only own fifty-two days, and some of them are spent worrying about your work. The rest, you run back and forth to your job, eating and sleeping to get ready for the next day's work. Why here, this last year has given us six and a half years of freedom and owning ourselves." He laughed up at her, from under his big hat, his blue eyes alight in the sun. "What d'you know about that!" he cried, as he heaved a new chrysanthemum of hay at her feet.

"Daddy, you're always so calm about things! Don't you ever have brain storms? Don't you ever get upset about things at all?" Nancy asked, fondly. "I can imagine you going through a cyclone, and picking up the pieces with a smile. 'Well, it's a good thing we didn't own a mansion. Think how much we'd have lost!' you'd say."

Peter laughed. "You think so?" he asked.

"Well, wouldn't you? You know, you're uniquely contented. Was there anything you ever wanted? I think that's why you've always been so happy—because you never wanted anything you couldn't have."

"I coulda wanted things," Peter said cryptically. "I coulda wanted a lotta things I couldn't have. Where would that have got me, lady?"

"But what would you have done, Daddy, if there was something you wanted very terribly, and it was the only thing in the world you were sure you had no business to have?" Nancy asked.

Peter rested on his pitchfork a moment. "I'd've just got more interested in you and Mother and Eric, and pretty soon I woulda stopped thinkin' about it," he smiled.

"You think that's a remedy for all sorts of wanting that doesn't fit in?"

"I guess so . . . . Something you want that you can't have, honey?" He hardly breathed as he asked it.

"Sorta." She fell back into the old vernacular. "What'd you think about just taking what you want, whether it looks as though it's going to be right or not?" she asked, looking off across the fields.

He thought of Joles, in a panic. He waited a moment.

"Well, if you could do it, that may be all right. But I kinda got a suspicion that people like you and me can't do it. Something in us won't let us, Nancy. We think we can, but there's something that holds us back inside. It's a question of wanting, I guess. You want this and that. You hafta choose, whether you know it or not. You want, we'll say, love that ain't quite convenient, and you want, same time, peace o' mind, and bein' able to look yourself in the face. If

you decide not to take the love, it ain't because you're honorable, particularly; it's simply that you want the lookin' yourself in the face more. Y'see what I mean?" he asked, taking off his hat and letting the wind blow through his thin gray hair. Nancy nodded soberly, and then packed the hay in the back of the wagon.

He didn't ask her any more. If she wanted to tell him, she would, most likely. They drove the hay wagon into the barn, and put the horses away. Sally kept running out to scold them for working so late, and letting her nice dinner spoil.

In the evening several of the neighbors came over to listen in on Peter's radio. Nancy was gracious and sweet with them. They were haughty old people, whose formality melted suddenly into friendliness when they saw how simple she was.

"She's right nice; not a bit stuck-up, like I thought she was goina be," the neighbors declared frequently during the visit. "Mrs. Lauren brags about her a lot, but she don't put on any airs. She's just a nice natural girl, 'spite of that movie or whatever she wrote."

After Sally and Nancy were asleep, Peter slipped out and sat on the front steps a long time, his bare toes curled against the cool stone, and his thin hair blowing lightly in the summer breeze.

"Whatever she does, I mustn't let her think it makes any difference to me," he said. "She'll always be my little youngster. . . .

"Just taking what you want! Joles musta reasoned like that when he took what he wanted and forgot all about Mother. She's got Joles in her." Then, hud-



dled in his thin pajamas against the doorstep, he thought of something else. "Yes, she's got Joles, but she's got some of me, too. Me wantin' the right thing more than the other—that's in her too," he comforted himself.

He leaned his head against the door, letting the wind cool his flushed face. He didn't know much about praying—no more than he knew about swearing! Anger and faith couldn't fit into words with Peter. But he leaned back his head and dumbly called on whatever it was that whipped grass into tallness, and ripened it for hay, whatever it was that taught little animals how to eat and to seek their kind, and brought Spring into places where no eye ever looked, and kept the moon and the stars playing their cycled drama in the sky. A wise little old man, huddled against his chunk of earth and pile of stones, bargaining yearningly with Force!

He heard a slight shuffling, and looked up to see Sally, silvered by the moonlight, holding her kimona about her. She slipped down beside him on the step, and patted his hand with her own.

"Don't you worry, Daddy," she whispered.

Peter nodded dumbly, wondering how she guessed whatever unmentioned danger it was he had glimpsed.

"No, I guess not," he said vaguely. "Nothin' very bad can ever happen to our baby," Sally said. But he saw she was worried and frightened. "I wish I knew . . . what do you think?"

Peter shook his head miserably.

"She seems so wise . . . she knows so much more



than me," Sally said, "but I keep reminding myself that in her heart she's just as simple as I am. Everyone is, don't you think, Peter? Knowin' ain't got much connection with feelin', d'you think?"

"No, I s'pose not. Oh, I'm all mixed up," Peter admitted wearily.

"Well, I'm not going to get scared," Sally said, and gathered the drooping little man in her arms like a child. "I'm going to keep her here as long as I can, and love her into safety."

"Ain't nothing we can do really," Peter said.

"No. Ain't it awful to think how little you can do to protect people you love?" Sally said. "You've just got to love them and help them, but they must decide things for themselves. That's the hardest thing I've had to learn about Nancy and Eric—and you, too! I just want to take things in my own hands and *make* them come out the way you want them to," she said earnestly. "I keep wishing I was God, so I could give you everything you ever want. Same when the children were little. Remember? It's a wonder I ever brought them up at all!"

"You're so good, Mother," Peter said.

Sally smiled, and held him closer. Her little boy, after all! She looked up at the sky, so puzzling and remote, and felt a little thrill of happiness run through her. She was filled with love to-night—filled with love, as the universe is filled with life. She felt wordlessly wise, as though some one had whispered the secret of everything in her ear. She wanted to laugh up at the sky, shake her brown curls over her eyes and dance.

Then she remembered she was a gray little woman, with a worry that woke her wide-eyed and frightened in the night, and caught in her throat when she tried to eat.



## *Chapter Thirty-three*

### SALLY AGAIN

#### I

THE time was drawing near for Nancy to leave. Each day found Sally more persistently cheerful, and more pathetic in her good-humor.

"Seems to me she could find material for a play nearer home, but if she thinks she oughta go to South America for it, I'm not goina stand in her way," Sally said to herself. South America seemed like another planet to her. There were so many unnamed dangers that could assail her child, so far away from home.

"You sure you can come home to visit next year, dear?" she asked Nancy anxiously. "I've heard of people gettin' so sorta fascinated with those tropical countries that they never want to come back. I read a story about a man who got a sorta spell put on him—of course, not really, I guess it didn't mean; but anyway he wasn't happy any place in the world any more after he'd been there—Siam or Honolulu, or some of those places," she confided to Nancy.

"Well, don't let that worry you, Mother. I'll come back all right. I've got a sort of a spell put on me here with you and Daddy, you know," Nancy laughed.

But she always felt as though she were talking about someone else. That ardent, reckless creature who had

made her willful decision seemed surely not this quiet girl, in the gingham frock and broad straw hat. When she lay in her white bed in the low ceilinged cool room under the eaves, at night, with the dotted-swiss curtains whipping gently in the breeze, she thought of that other person, and she seemed remote. Even the white-browed stranger, whose words somehow cast a magic about her, and whose hands had an enchantment she could not resist, seemed not quite real. A vivid, breath-taking dream she had had!

Somehow, Lou could never be imagined in this world of Sally and Peter. Nancy wished, for the first conscious time, that he were a clean young boy . . . . never mind how inexperienced; never mind how poor. She would love to be poor with him. That denied dream was a sharp, inexplicable little pain. She imagined them living in two furnished rooms, Lou studying at night, she doing a half-time job to make ends meet. Or, better still, she wished she were a helpless, helpful young person such as Mother must have been. Certainly this great love could occupy all her time. She could build a house and a family and a life out of it. And instead she must cramp it into a strange half-life. No little Nancy, no little Lou! Only a falsehood Heaven that people would talk about. A Heaven that Mother and Daddy could never know about. Underneath her conversation with Daddy and Mother this current kept running. Whatever she did in that quiet little house, she was thinking about that other life she soon would be living.

When she saw Mother and Daddy introducing her

to neighbors, with unconcealed pride, she was hurt by the picture of those neighbors—talking, talking, talking! Unforeseen things did happen in this world. Suppose the boat sank on the way to Peru, and out would come the story of Lou and Nancy being rescued (or lost) on their unconventional honeymoon. *Something* would surely happen to her that would make gossip come back!

She'd never mind for herself. Let the world talk if it wanted to—but she could not bear to think of Daddy and Mother, so little, so proud, scathed by this unkind talk.

Farther and farther, the bright vision seemed to withdraw. Sometimes she woke, shaking, in the night, wondering that she could be contemplating such madness. Daddy and Mother! She could never come back to them, that way. Daddy's dear patient eyes, and his quaint rigor! She would feel a hunted thing, somewhere in the beautiful remote spots of the earth where she would live with Lou; she would be thinking of Daddy and tender, quaint little Mother, wherever she was, and wherever she was it would taint her happiness. What a mess—this dazzling radiance that was her love, and linked with it this sickening doubt and fear!

## 2

"I wish I had something beautiful to give you, dear." Sally broke into her misery to say. They were cleaning out Mother's already tidy attic. Sally was

rakishly turbaned in a clean towel, her face pink and flushed below it, her round little figure in crackling gingham. Nancy was half-heartedly going through an old trunk of her own.

"I wish I was the kind of a mother that could give you some lovely old lace or jewelry or something," Sally was saying. "I never was the kind of a mother you should have, honey. I ain't much, I'm afraid. You ought to have a tall, dignified white-haired mother who knows how to do everything, like entertaining for you. Like Mrs. Swan I guess. I always wished I was more like that, but now I wish it more than ever."

"Oh no, dear. Just the way you are is best," Nancy said, laughing down at her. Sally put her armful of children's clothes back in the trunk, and Nancy saw she was trembling with emotion.

"Well, love ought to count for something," Sally said unsteadily. "I certainly love you enough for anything. I want everything for you that you want, whether you ought to have it or not."

"I wonder if you do?" Nancy asked.

"One part of me does," Sally said honestly.

"And the rest of you?"

"The rest of me knows that in the long run you've got to have the *right* things . . . the honest, old-fashioned things to make you happy. Oh, my darling, I'm just a funny, little woman, but I know this about you. You've got something in you that will never be satisfied with anything but the best of life. Not the things other people think are best, but the things you



know, inside yourself. You'll have money, and fine people around you, whatever you do. I know you will, but there's something inside that will make you choose the real, honest thing every time." Sally had forgotten herself now. Her customary shyness had dropped away; her homely little face was lighted by the essential brightness of her inner vision.

Suddenly Nancy was a little girl, clinging to her mother and crying. Out of the chaos and shadow, she felt herself coming home to the unpledged creed the little Laurens had to follow.

"Oh, Mother, you simply can't know," she sobbed. "You're the most wonderful thing in the world. Words are too little, darling." They clung together a few moments, nearer than they had been since Nancy played in a world built of Sally's wistful imagination.

"I think my heart has hiccoughs," Sally cried, kissing Nancy and swallowing tears. "I do love you so, and I'm so happy."

They sat together on the trunk, and Sally felt paid for all the months Nancy had lived away. All her loneliness and unacknowledged hurt at having her child prefer gay Emily was healed by that unexpected moment.

"You're so darling, you funny little thing," Nancy said shakily. "You've got more power in one faltering little word than anyone else in the world for me."

Sally only sensed what she meant; she knew that knowing wasn't necessary; understanding was what mattered.

"Some day, when I'm a very old lady," Nancy said

soberly, "I'm going to tell you just what you did this morning."

"And then I'll tell you just what *you* did," Sally replied.

That night, kneeling beside the little bed, as she loved to write, with the candle flickering on a chair beside her, she wrote to Lou. She put the letter into the envelope without reading it, and slipped into her little bed, to lie straight and tearless until morning.

"You must understand, my dearest. It doesn't mean that I love you less . . . you know that is something I can never change," she wrote. "It is only that I cannot do it. I have an instinctive certainty that we would spoil this love of ours if we took it in that way. Love is something to be proud of. This love of ours is too beautiful to be an outlaw. Whether we admitted it or not, we would always be defending it in our minds. I could not stand that, Lou, and neither could you, I believe. Try to understand, Lou. . . ."

The next day she drove to Bluemont in the little car to post her letter. She drove home slowly. She had no plans; she was tired. The future looked like a blank wall, in which there was no door. She was too unsure of herself this morning to make any plans. Perhaps she would go back to Emily; perhaps she would stay here with Mother and Daddy, forever and ever. She had said forever and ever so many times in her own mind. Whenever she thought of Lou it had been to that refrain. Well, this would be a new forever and forever.

All that day she knew a strange, quiet happiness.

"Where *have* I been?" she asked herself. "I haven't felt like this for *months*." She remembered Emily telling her of the transport of happiness Emily had known in a hospital once after she had been ill. This must be what Emily had meant. For surely Nancy had been soul-sick for many months.

Much as she knew she loved Lou, she felt a happy liberation now that she had decided, once and for all, that she could not go to him in that shabby, questionable way.

"I've always been impatient and annoyed with people for having just the kind of elation I know now," Nancy analyzed herself ruthlessly, "but it's just as real a happiness as love is."



## *Chapter Thirty-four*

### EVELYN DECIDES

#### 1

A FEW nights after Nancy had left Chestnut Hill for Virginia, Emily sat by her window until almost dawn. A thick, crumpled letter written by Sally at the end of Nancy's first day at home lay in her lap. Probably it was the longest letter Sally had ever written—the longest, and the most desperately earnest. Emily knew it almost by heart.

"Once I used to be jealous of you, dear Mrs. Swan, because Nancy thought so much of you, and told you so much. I know now that was foolish of me, and I am sorry I was so small in my mind. But you see I am so proud of my little girl, and I am half afraid of her, too, because she seems so wonderful, and I cannot imagine where her wonderfulness came from. I used to look in her eyes when she was a little baby, and they looked back at me, and I used to talk to her in a way that I could never talk to anybody else, ever. I wanted her to be wonderful and fine, but I never dreamed she could be what she is. I suppose she is only human, but to me it don't seem possible she could ever do anything cheap or wrong.

"I guess you have done the most of anybody in the world to make her what she is. I know you talk to her

in a beautiful way I never could; maybe the things I think in my heart to tell her are said to her by you, and that is all that matters. I am so ashamed that I was ever jealous of you, Mrs. Swan, and I want you to know that I know you have led my little girl into a way of living that is finer and bigger than anything I could hope for. . . ."

In the face of Emily's advice to Nancy, Sally's letter seemed a masterpiece of irony. Emily hardly knew whether to laugh, or to cry with remorse and shame. It is so easy to forget the simple, clean standards of that other big-little world, she thought, as she visualized the catastrophe she had unthinkingly invited to descend on that little world. She was appalled that she could have forgotten how that so-easily-taken step of Nancy's would seem to Sally and Peter.

"I must not let it happen," she told herself, passionately. "I must do something to make it right!"

When she heard the servants stirring early in the morning, she called her maid and asked her to pack a small bag.

"I'm going to New York for a few days. I shall need only an afternoon frock and a dinner gown, and the ensemble I shall wear. See what time the next train leaves. Never mind; I'll telephone, and you get my bath ready."

By ten o'clock she was on her way, Sally's letter in her bag for fortification. She thought of that far-away, simple little woman who had so much power over people that her very trust in them to do the straight thing that seemed unquestionably right gently

*forced* people to do that thing. And yet Sally herself, meek, timid little being, could never be pictured forcing anything in all her life!

She remembered all the high-handed philosophies she had expounded to Nancy, with a flush of shame. And yet they *were* true, she told herself. Her mind was a weary hand organ, grinding out a little round of tunes, over and over. She bought a magazine to keep from thinking, but between the pages she kept seeing the small house of Lauren, set in italics in its neighborhood by gossip. Sally and Peter, bewildered and crushed, could never contend with people talking. And certainly people would talk sooner or later.

"Things are so and so, very definitely, in theory," she said petulantly to herself. "They fall into their classifications neatly. But in life they are maddeningly vague. Everything has so much wrong in it, and so much right, like changeable silk, all wrong when you hold it so, all right when you turn it the other way."

But she knew that Nancy's right to happiness could never justify endangering the peace of defenseless little Sally and Peter.

Against her will she began to think of Evelyn Dane—that proud, ancient enemy of hers—the hyphen that stood between despairing-gay life.

Eighteen years ago it had been. Emily could count on her unjeweled fingers the number of times the other woman had occupied her mind. That was her formula for peace—putting aside the hurdles that simply couldn't be jumped.



Lou had been so young—a little younger than either woman. He believed in the right of wanting. Undaunted by the failure of his brief married life, he sought about with insouciant avidness for new toys for happiness. So far away it all seemed that Emily could scarcely visualize the youth she had loved so expensively, except to remember that he had possessed her with a fierce tyranny that had seemed quite enough at the time.

“My Buccaneer Lover,” she used to call him. She remembered the old term with the abstract detachment that only years can give the patina of pain. Deliberately she tried to recall dear intimacies, but they were covered with the dust of indifference. She hardly knew how long they had lived together those mad hectic months, filled with passion and hurt and delight. Over and over, she remembered, they had crashed against each other’s barriers, pleading false promises, then, in an agony of remorse. Tragic and charming, this tarididdle love, a thing of confetti and tears and griefs grown absent-minded.

But the goading scorn of Evelyn! Emily half-admitted it had driven her into—and out of—this doomed infatuation.

If Evelyn had been a dog-in-the-manger of Lou’s life, she was certainly a sleek little Pekinese—an insolent little plutocrat, assuming monopoly and indifferent to it.

Only once had the two women bargained about Lou’s loving, and then it had been a contest of pride against pride. With the artificiality in which both excelled,

they glinted off each other's armour, unsuspecting what lay beneath, and caring not at all.

Even now Emily relished the memory of the encounter, because she knew she had been a stunning, vivid figure in the drama—a splendid fugitive who gloried in her banditry. So young! So passionately certain about things that had dimmed to banality now!

She was glad to have escaped the necessity of holding that outworn, ardent attitude. Evelyn had been less fortunate; her pose must be maintained through years of pale hating.

If love—mad, ardent, consuming love—can wilt with years, surely much less poignant hate must become creaky and old, with nothing to gnaw on but discarded dignities.

If only she could find Evelyn, under her protective coloring. If she could, somehow, touch some reality in this unknown person whom she had hated so habitually, even after the cause for hating was forgotten!

In New York Emily located Evelyn, and called her immediately at her hotel.

"I'm sure it would be charming to see you again," Evelyn said, in her cold, thin voice, "but I really don't see how I can manage it. I'm here only for a day or so attending to some stupid business."

"You must manage it," Emily said firmly. "Don't be silly! Are you alone now? I shall be right over—in ten minutes."

"Impetuous as usual, aren't you?" Evelyn laughed lightly. "I'm dressing to go out to tea. I'm sorry I can't ask you to join me. . . ."

"No need to. I'll be there in ten minutes. You'd better 'phone and make apologies, in case we don't finish in time," Emily said.

"Well, really," Evelyn began indignantly. But only a little click answered her.

Emily found her not much changed by the passage of eighteen tranquil years. Evelyn was a thin, blonde woman, of the fragile, aloof type that life touches lightly. Her hair was modishly dressed, and her delicate skin skillfully made up. But her eyes, under their fine, brushed brows, were tarnished and weary. Her voice had aged the most, Emily thought. There was a nervous, rasping quality, that crept into it when she spoke unguardedly.

"How delightful of you to let your hair go white," she said perfunctorily. "It is really more stunning than when it was dark, don't you think? It gives you a dashing look." Emily made no comment and Mrs. Dane sank again among her silken cushions.

"Didn't Lou get the letter?" she asked, in her hard, impudent tone.

"Evelyn, I have something difficult to do, and you must try to help me a little. We have hated each other so long that we owe each other at least respect, don't you think? Someone says you pay your enemies more respect than you ever offer your friends," Emily said a little nervously, sitting rather tense in her chair, with her sables loosened about her slender throat, and her gloved hands clasped tightly in her lap.

"I suppose so," Evelyn replied indifferently. "We have wasted a great deal of emotional energy on each

other I suppose. I presume you have made this charming visit to ask me to divorce Lou? I told him that I really didn't care to."

"I know you don't. And he is reconciled to it, of course."

"And you?" she asked lowering her fragile eyelids, and smiling. Something at last, for her hate to gnaw on! It was evident she enjoyed this meeting to the fullest.

"You know I told you eighteen years ago that it didn't matter to me whether you did or not," Emily said bitterly. "I have never asked you to divorce him, you will remember."

"You were too proud," Evelyn challenged.

"Perhaps it was pride. Yes, it was, of a sort," Emily admitted thoughtfully.

"And have you been successful in your pride?" the other woman asked with her cold smile. "I know you have not been together. I know where he has been most of the time. I am frankly rather surprised to learn that you are still planning something together."

"You know very well that if we had cared enough, we should not have let you stand in our way. It may have been you that broke our caring, but if it was, we were unconscious of it at the time," Emily cried vehemently. "I told you that morning that whether or not you divorced him didn't matter. I told you we would go away and make a life together in spite of you. . . ."

"But you didn't," Evelyn said, triumphantly.

"Only because, before we managed it, we had ceased

to care enough," the white-haired woman said in a small voice. Evelyn was not positive if there was defeat in her quietness.

"So you have waited all these years, and now you are asking me again?" Her thin lips were twisted with amusement.

"No!" vehemently. "I should never ask you . . . . for myself. You know that." Suddenly Emily crumpled, her face in her hands. Mrs. Dane was startled. She had never seen this old enemy humbled. Mrs. Swan recovered almost instantly.

"It will be hard for you to understand this. It is so foreign to the *me* you used to know, my dear. I'm asking you to divorce him for another woman." She said it defiantly; her vivid eyes were pleading behind their tears. "Evelyn, how queer! I cannot understand it myself. I am tired of thinking about it. But that is it. I am asking you to give Lou his freedom . . . . for someone else."

Mrs. Dane's coldness was shaken by Emily's humility. "Tell me about it," she said, with unexpected softness.

"She is such a wonderful little thing, Evelyn. You would feel it if you saw her. She is like coming across a bed of embers in a dark forest, so real, and so primitively beautiful. I cannot tell you exactly. But they love each other in a way neither you nor I have ever known, my dear," Emily said. "She is just a girl, but she has somehow called out something in Lou that has never been before. You would not believe it, Evelyn. He is so humble, and so utterly abject before this love



of his. Not his old arrogance, and cruel masterfulness."

Evelyn sat very still. Her lips were pale and tremulous in their smile.

"You see, I knew little of that masterfulness, my dear," she said. "Lou never really loved me enough to want to master me." There was no vindictiveness in her tone now; only the dignity of despair.

Swiftly Emily rose and came over to her chair. With the gesture of a proud queen, she held the other woman's head between her two hands a moment, while she looked into her eyes. Then she kissed her softly on the lips.

"My dear! My dear!" she said compassionately. "And I have been so merciless to you in my judgment!"

Curtains of twilight gathered in the room while they sat together on Evelyn's *chaise longue*, talking about Nancy . . . and what Sally and Peter had meant in Emily's life.

"And doesn't it hurt a bit for you to see him loving this child?" Evelyn asked wonderingly.

"It isn't a question of hurting, my dear. I had my chance to make him, and I could not make him divine. Nancy can. You see? I have no claim on him. . . ."

"You give up your old proud claim! Surely my little stubborn one is a small thing to throw into the balance," Evelyn said. She touched her handkerchief to her faded eyes, and bent over to kiss Emily, almost gratefully.





## *Chapter Thirty-five*

### HEAVEN-FOR-TWO

#### 1

NANCY was getting ready to go back to Chestnut Hill. She intended merely to telegraph Emily that she was coming, without trying to explain in a letter. Even when she saw Emily it would be hard to make her understand the strange, quiet ecstasy of her decision. She hoped Emily wouldn't be difficult; she hoped she herself could keep the steadfastness Mother had kindled, even in the face of Emily's pat arguments justifying the divine right of doing what you please.

Mother seemed not so desolated at having her go, now that the last few days at home were upon them. In fact, Mother seemed repressedly blithe, mysteriously—gay and solemn all at once. "Oh you darling, darling!" Mother said, catching her and swiftly kissing some part of her face, many times a day. "It's almost as good as being young myself, to have you so young and happy."

"So happy?" Nancy questioned, off her guard.

Mother laughed deliciously. "You will be to-morrow, dear. Happiness for you is always going to be on the way." Dear, simple Mother, busy and important about some little "surprise"—a going-away party, no

doubt, or some present she and Daddy had hidden away for the last moment. Nancy felt so old and wise in her renunciation and grief that she had a patient tolerance of Mother's littleness, and the littleness of all life, this morning.

"Why don't you take something to read and go off for a little while, honey," Mother suggested transparently. "I want to get something ready to surprise you." Her delight was hopping up and down in her blue eyes. "Why don't you put on that nice little yellow dress I like so well?"

"All right, you funny." Nancy couldn't help laughing at Mother's elation. She kissed her with the fond condescension one shows a happy, busy child. "All right, darling. I'll be out of the way for a while."

Listlessly she put on the yellow organdie and took her big hat. Probably Mother was having some neighbors in for luncheon to say good-bye. Well, bless her heart, she shouldn't be disappointed in her party if Nancy could help it! She wondered how she could ever make the effort to be gay to-day. She was too tired. Her mind was like a hayfield from which all the grass has been cut—nothing left to sway and bend in the wind! Breezes passed over it and rain, but there was no bending and rising to meet them. She wondered if it would be like this always. No, of course it wouldn't. Some day she would be able to think of Lou without that sick nostalgia, that homesick crying in her heart that she tried so gallantly not to hear. . . .

She crossed the fields behind the house and went through the cool, quiet woods up the side of the moun-

tain. One place was as good as another; all the places she could ever find would be meaningless for her now. She must not think those things. This morning the world seemed as serene as a well regulated nursery. She sat on a rock and looked up into the open sky. So beautiful and remote, old tolerant earth goes placidly on from age to age, heartbreakingly oblivious of the turbulence of her little guests! On that far-away day when confetti snow was all about, the world had seemed made of joy and new love. Probably that very day there had been desolate people, huddled somewhere with their grief. To-day, when all her world was bleak and pinched with despair, somewhere there must be girls whose eyes were burnished with happiness. Ecstasy or despair did not change the immutable earth. One must learn to be like the earth, calm and unchanged. No tearing pain about things that had been for a little while, and then were never any more.

To-day she would think of Lou, and then put him away forever. She would remember how his hair grew to a point on his forehead; how the strange, vibrant chord of his voice made something answer in her heart; she would remember his mouth, with its twisted wing of ironical humor, his tan hard hands, never quite at peace.

"How does he seem when he strikes you for the first time?" Emily had asked.

"Pathetic," she had answered. God! The dashing pathos of him!

She leaped up from the rock, and went striding down

through the woods. Better to talk . . . about anything. She stumbled along blindly, her bright hair catching and clinging to the sumac bushes, dry little whimpers, like an accidentally squeezed accordion, escaping from her twitching lips. Suddenly she felt someone nearby. Unbelievably, there, with the baffled tender smile, was Lou, hurrying towards her and laughing an excited laugh that was strangely like a sob.

"Dear child, dear child," he was crying madly. "You don't know! My precious, it's all going to be perfect! Can you believe it?"

She clung to him, dry-eyed and sobbing. Imagine going along without him! What nonsense. Her hands were little flames caressing his face, the white hair at his brow, his rough, smoky, salty-smelling coat.

They said nothing for a long time. There seemed nothing important enough to say. Their bodies drew ancient solace from being quiet and near. Their eyes had come home to each other from an alien journey.

"I found your mother," Lou said finally. "Such a darling—you grown simple and wise."

Nancy nodded wordlessly. Something miraculous had happened, but one didn't question a miracle.

"I haven't forgotten a thing about you," she said irrelevantly. "I tried so hard, too. Suppose I ever can?" with a pitiable archness.

"Suppose you'll never have a chance," he laughed boyishly, with a tremulous fringe on his laughter. "You'll never be more than two yards away from me again, Adorable. I should think we could be married by Christmas."

Nancy looked quickly up at him, afraid to believe what she hoped. "Your letter came. And six hours later came one from Evelyn. She's letting me go, Nancy. I don't know how or why, but she's doing it as soon as she can. She'll get the divorce as soon as she goes back to Paris, and we'll be married, surely by Christmas."

"For being good," Nancy said solemnly. "I was so good, Lou. But being good was so terribly bad for me."

And then, for no reason at all, since everything fitted miraculously into heaven-for-two, Nancy began to cry.

Lou didn't interfere, but made her comfortable with a big, masculine handkerchief, and the best crying-place ever discovered.

"So you saw Mother?" Nancy looked up from his shoulder to ask, at last.

"Saw her! Why we've even wired back and forth to each other, young lady. Emily suggested I telegraph her I was roaring south."

"And Mother knew all about it? The little blessed! She sent me away so we could find each other here by ourselves. I thought she was planning some miserable picnic or something—and she was really waiting for you!" Nancy's eyes were forgetting they'd ever known tears.

"And now I know all about why I love you," Lou laughed at her. "I've seen the original of you now, and it's all so clear to me just why I've been looking all over the world to find you."

"Why?" Nancy asked.

"Because your mother is what the Lord had in mind when he said 'Let there be peace'," he said no less profoundly because of his inaccuracy.

"I'm jealous," said Nancy, creeping a kiss along his chin and up to his mouth.





## *Chapter Thirty-six*

### THE LUCK OF THE LAURENS

AFTER Lou had gone back to South America in the summer, Nancy stayed happily on the farm, writing better things than she had ever written before.

"You see now I have something worth talking about; not just stumbling about in the dark, exploring unhappiness and being subtle," she said to Mother, about her new stories.

"There are so many things in life itself that might make you almost believe only in bein' unhappy and upset, that I always hoped you'd want to write things that were merry and sweet, and kind of heart warming," Sally told her. "I guess those stories ain't so fashionable, but people need 'em, just the same."

Nancy used to remember those perplexed writings that had striven lamely to keep up with the sophistication of the studio Emily built to house them. Values had toppled so hopelessly out of place in those days. She had even been apologetic and ashamed, in a chagrined defensive way, about Mother and Daddy! What a glorious, blind world, lighted, surely, by love and the dear homely things that mean happy living with your kind.

All the Laurens came home for Sally's birthday in October. Emily was to come early in December for

the wedding, and now Sally was in the height of her glory, brimming with plans and preparations. She was as proud and elated about Lou as her awe of him would permit. He had the subtle, chivalrous ways she had always admired in men, but had never really known before. "He's like I usta imagine a prince would be," she whispered shyly to herself.

"He's got something about his way of treating you that makes you feel like a queen," she said to Nancy, as they were cooking the birthday dinner. Sally loved talking about Lou at every slight excuse. So did Nancy.

"It's not because he's so distinguished lookin', altogether, though of course that helps a lot. He seems to listen to what you say so careful, like it was awful important. He makes me fall all over myself," Sally giggled, and her blue eyes were roguish behind her gold rimmed glasses.

"He knows you *are* pretty important," Nancy said earnestly. "He knows better than most people could what a really *big* little woman you are."

Sally blushed with pleasure. "You take him awful calm, though," she said to cover up her delight.

"I'll tell you something; I don't really," Nancy whispered playfully. "I'm really awfully thrilled every time he looks in my direction. You see I almost couldn't have him—and he'll always be desperately wonderful in my mind."

Peter liked him, also. Lou let Peter talk at great length with never a hint of being patronizing. Peter expounded his shy theories about this-and-that, and

basked in the younger man's flattering attention.

"I'd like to make him a radio," Peter said after Lou had left. "I could just as well as not. Wouldn't cost me so much, and I guess he'd like to have a good radio, 'way off down there." For weeks he worked on his gift, and Nancy's heart almost choked with love as she watched him. She knew that Lou had the last word in perfected radio in his home, but she felt that the gift would tell him exactly what it told her, and since she considered gifts subjective rather than objective this one would more than fulfill its mission.

"For a man that's been all over the world and seen everything the way he has, he's got a awful nice way o' lookin' at things," Peter said.

Experience and education and travel, to Peter's mind, surely must exact some due from people who enjoyed them. Some wholesomeness, some interest in small things, Peter felt, must be lost to compensate for having experience. But this man seemed to have lost nothing. He laughed at simple humor, and put on no airs. During his visit he played with Peter's sheep dog, and helped Peter dig potatoes, just like a regular fellow!

Only the Laurens attended the birthday dinner. Nicky had been vaccinated for kindergarten, and Marian was afraid to take him out to Grandma's, for a day or two.

"Well, I'm kinda glad. We'll just have our own little family together," Sally said. "It's the first time we've had Eric and Nancy together alone for years and years."

Sally made her own birthday cake, with sixteen little pink candles on it. There was the big chicken which always signified a celebration to the Laurens. Peter carved, and wore his coat at the table, just as though there was "company". He told the funny stories Eric and Nancy remembered, and Sally beamed delightedly throughout the meal. Nancy and Peter pulled the wishbone, and Peter gave his wish to Sally, because he couldn't think of anything to wish for, he said. . . .

Now they all sat in the big broad living room . . . . which Sally no longer called the drawing room. Drawing rooms didn't seem just the thing to her in the country. Soon they would light the lamps and Nancy and Eric would play partners against Daddy and Mother in a game of five hundred. Peter didn't believe in bridge; too many people played for money.

It was pleasant now to sit a moment before the open fire, with Nancy on the floor at Mother's feet, Eric puffing on his pipe, and Daddy leaning forward into the firelight, his elbows on his knees, his hands clasped. Daddy never got tired of looking into a fire someway, but he seemed annoyed when people talked about how beautiful it was.

"We're a lucky gang of people," Eric said suddenly, pulling on his pipe so that the little ember lighted his lean, Scandinavian face. As he grew older he looked more like old Joles, Sally thought.

"Fella was tellin' me his troubles comin' up on the train this afternoon. His old man and his mother are gettin' a divorce, and his wife is so mad about it she's left him and gone back home. His money's kindova

worry, too, he said, because he has to spend a lot to keep up a stylish appearance, and he ain't got so much as his frien's think. I got to thinkin' how lucky we been all our lives."

"Yes," said Peter, nodding his head, "people like us don't know what trouble is, I guess. Things always run sorta smooth for us, some way. Nothin' dangerous ever came around bothering us, did it?"

But in their four separate ways each was thinking of a menace each alone had known, and that each alone had prevented from threatening the peace of this little group.

"No," they agreed. "Well, we've been awfully lucky!"

Peter lighted the lamps. . . .









